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SHORT STORIES

JUNE 14. 1D

Mary Vernon started to her feet. "I've said I'll stake a 'monkey,' and I'll keep my word." She took out her diamond earrings and dropped them on the table.

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 702.] For the Week Ending June 14th, 1902. [ONE PENNY.

NEW SERIES STARTS TO-DAY.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

Cynthia: Her Companion.

No. I.

WITH THE SMART SET IN A COUNTRY HOUSE.

"THIS," said cousin, Frances Norton, with a wave of the hand, "is my new companion, Cynthia Hamilton."

The introduction left me speechless and standing. The men—the room seemed furnished with men—stared, and a pink-faced youth, with a wonderful thing in waistcoats, opined I was a "lucky girl," otherwise I was not noticed.

"Sit down, Cynthia," said my cousin. "Fluffy, get the child a cup of tea."

Thankfully I dropped into the nearest chair, and Fluffy—the name suggested a pet poodle, and I felt surprised when a middle-aged man, with a sleek head, responded to the call—brought me tea and cake.

I pushed my chair into a less conspicuous position, and, under cover of my cup and saucer examined my surroundings.

The room was large and well lit, but furnished in a style that surprised me. The floor was of oak, spread with rugs, of bright colours, something like Liberty bed-spreads. There was a miscellanous collection of prints on the wall, and quite a large number of china pots in the corners of the room and on the mantelpiece.

I was not struck with the general effect, and wondered that Lady Winchin—at whose place Frances was staying—had not better taste. I learnt afterwards that it was quite the smartest thing in smoke-rooms—all the same, it reminded me of a sixpenny bazaar.

There were a good many people having tea, some ten men and as many women. I noticed that none of the latter took much notice of my cousin, but the men talked to her eagerly.

I had not seen Frances since her marriage eight years back to Richard Norton, a coffee planter in Jamaica. Many changes had come in Frankie's life since then. She had lost her husband, left Jamaica, and settled in England. But no change, I thought, could have been greater, than that which had taken place in my cousin herself. I remembered her at the convent, at Bruges, where we had been educated, an angular, not to say awkward girl, with a sallow skin and a mouse-coloured mop of hair. The Frankie of to-day was very different; she was tall and slender, with splendid shoulders, long limbs, and a marked grace of movement, her skin creamy, flushed to pink in her cheeks, a pink that at times deepened to carmine, while her hair was wavy and of a bright chestnut shade. I could not tell whether, or no, her face was beautiful—others besides me found it difficult to decide—but that it possessed a fascination far more powerful than mere loveliness was indisputable. Perhaps the secret lay in her ever-varying expression, or, it may have been her eyes, soft and dark as pansies, that attracted. On that afternoon she was the centre of a group of men, the other women some of them handsome, all well dressed, being left in the cold

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My meditations, at this point, were interrupted by the pink-faced youth who had spoken to me on my arrival.

"Have some more tea," he said affably, "no? Well, let me take your cup," and he subsided into a chair beside me.

"Awfully fond of your cousin. Eh?" he asked.

I explained that I had a great affection for Frances, but that we had not met each other for eight years, "not since I was a child of eleven," I explained.

"Been at school ever since?" he queried.

"Yes, I've come straight from Bruges. Frances wrote to me to join her here."

He nodded, smiled amiably, if vacuously, and gazed at Frankie.

"Lovely woman, your cousin. We're all gone on her, Miss Hamilton. I'm fearfully in love, you know, not that I've a ghost of a chance. Still, you never *can* tell," he added fatuously.

"Who is that tall, distinguished-looking man talking to my cousin?" I asked.

The pink youth grinned.

"Sir John Strickland, late Colonel of Hussars, simply mad on Mrs. Norton," but—with a shake of the head, "there's no chance for him; he's poor as a church mouse, a beggarly fifteen hundred a year, no more; and that, you know, Miss Hamilton, is simply nothing to a woman like your cousin."

It seemed a great deal to me. I looked with interest at Sir John, a man of about forty-five, square shouldered, keen faced, with a look of pride about the well-cut mouth, and a certain carriage of the head that compelled the term aristocratic in describing him. His manner was very courteous, and his speech singularly free from modern flippancies.

He was bending over my cousin with a look of admiration in his eyes.

"Yes," said the pink boy, following my gaze, "you're right, Miss Hamilton, it is a case."

I wondered how Frankie felt towards Sir John, she did not talk much to him but gave more of her attention to a younger man, who, seated on the hearthrug, leant his head against her knee in a confiding sort of fashion.

"That's Hartland, Lord Kinross, you know," said my informant. "Lucky chap!" he added enviously.

His lordship, I judged was about twenty-six or seven. He was tall, slight, and boyish in figure, a pleasant face, though his features were quite ordinary. Impossible to compare him with Sir John, in my opinion; and then a moment later that opinion changed. Lord Kinross, I discovered, had the most charming smile in the world. It transformed him from a commonplace person to an intensely fascinating one.

I wondered which of her two admirers Frankie liked the better. Lord Kinross or Sir John? Both seemed equally devoted to her.

"I suppose"—the pink person once more disturbed my reverie—"I suppose you know Fluffy, don't you?"

I intimated that my acquaintance with the sleek-headed gentleman only dated from that afternoon.

"Really! I made sure you'd heard of him at any rate. He's such a great friend of your cousin's. Thomson is his real name, you know, but, as I told him, it was too impossible for words, so we call him Fluffy, eh!"

My new acquaintance had a habit of thus finishing his sentences. At first I took it that he meant to ask a question, and I felt distressed that I never knew the answer. After a while I realised that it meant nothing, still it was disconcerting.

I should have liked to hear more about Sir John and Lord Kinross, but felt shy at asking too many questions. Apparently my silence bored the youth, for he presently got up and strolled away.

I did not feel so strange now that I knew more of the people round me. I was warmly interested in Sir John Strickland and Lord Kinross; the pink youth, also an admirer of my cousin's, did not greatly concern me. As for Fluffy—at that moment patiently holding a plate of macaroons for my cousin—I could not determine if he was merely a friend of Frankie's or if he entertained for her a warmer feeling. It was a difficult question, and one to which I did not easily find the answer.

Some of the women now left the room, and the group round Frankie split up, only Sir John and his rival remained. Lord Kinross, still on the hearthrug, looked extremely comfortable, but Sir John seemed ill at ease. He leant against the mantelpiece serious and silent, frowning when Frankie lightly smoothed the dark head resting on her lap. His lordship took possession of her hand, and patted it admiringly.

"Pretty—isn't it, Strickland?" he said, and audaciously kissed the slim, white fingers.

Sir John, however, made no reply, but deliberately walked out of the room, leaving Frankie and Lord Kinross alone—except for me.

"You're atrocious, Hartland," said my cousin, "you really mustn't do such things."

He faced round and stared at her.

"You don't object really?" he asked.

My cousin flushed.

"Seriously, Frankie, I didn't think you minded. I'll behave better in future. It's only the exuberance of my admiration, you know." He smiled as he spoke, but Frankie shook her head.

"You don't deserve forgiveness," she said and got up from her chair.

"Still"—Lord Kinross smiled at her—"I am forgiven?"

"I suppose so—you generally get your own way."

"Women are generally so kind in giving it me," he murmured.

Frankie made no answer, but moved towards the door. Half-way across the room she stopped. "Good gracious, Cynthia," she exclaimed, "I'd forgotten all about you. Come upstairs with me and dress."

"The Moat," as Lady Winchin's place was called, was a lovely house—outside the smoke-room. The hall was very large and lofty, with pointed arches of black oak curiously carved. Gnome-like faces peeped out from wreaths of acorns, grotesques peered from garlands of oak apples. The hall was fitted with electric light, and the effect of the innumerable lamps with their silver points of flame, against the blackness of the oak, was dazzling.

From the hall we passed up a wide staircase carpeted with a soft felt of palest green. The walls of the staircase were lined with pictures, and along the wide corridor that led to Frankie's room, were statues.

I had never seen or heard of any room so lovely as my cousin's. The draperies and curtains were of pale mauve, embroidered with an artistic design of deep-hued pansies. The carpet was white with clusters of heartsease, and the chairs white also with pale-coloured cushions. The tall mirror in its oaken frame reflected the cheery fire, which gleamed on the silver brushes, and the crystal bottles on the toilet table. The bed was a mass of soft white drapery, and the subtle fragrance of violets filled the room.

Frankie drew a lounge chair towards the fire and motioned me to take another. For awhile we sat in silence. I felt strange, not to say shy, and waited for my cousin to speak. I longed to tell her how pleased I had been to receive her letter

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engaging me as companion, how excited I was at the thought of all I should see in this new life; so different from the years passed in the convent.

At last she turned towards me.

"You're pleased to come to me, Cynthia?"

"Very," I returned, enthusiastically.

"Tired of the convent?" she asked with an amused look in her eyes.

"I was very happy there as a pupil," I answered, "but I did not like the idea of becoming a teacher. The sisters all sent their love to you, Frankie, and the girls—those who knew you—gave me all sorts of nice messages."

Frankie nodded, but did not show much interest.

"I am pleased to have you with me, Cynthia," she said after a while, "and I daresay we shall get on very well. It will be your own fault if not. There's only one thing you have to remember, never to speak of me or my affairs to anyone. If you do I shall send you back to Bruges without the least compunction."

I flushed, pained by her words.

"I should not have done so in any case, Frankie," I replied. "Besides, what do I know of you?"

She took a quick glance at me and frowned.

"Quite sufficient to chatter," she said coldly. "It doesn't suit me for you to discuss my past, present, or future. You understand?"

"Yes," I said quietly, "I understand."

There were many things I wished to ask my cousin. I had looked forward to hearing about her life in Jamaica. I felt curious as to what had happened during the two years that had elapsed since Richard Norton's death. But what she had said prohibited any such questions. I had parted from my cousin eight years back at the convent, six years of which she had spent in a remote part of Jamaica. Now we met in the house of Lady Winchin, a wealthy woman, known in Society as one of the leaders of the smart set. It would have been interesting to learn the chain of circumstances that had brought Frankie from Jamaica to "The Moat." They were so very far apart.

I glanced at my cousin as she sat by the fire. She was beautifully dressed, and wore some valuable rings.

I drew my own conclusions as to what had happened. Richard Norton had left her better off than was expected—he had not been considered a rich man. Money I had been told is the key that unlocks every door, and Frankie was charming as well as rich.

My cousin interrupted my thoughts.

"You're very pretty, Cynthia," she said. "I was half afraid you wouldn't be good looking. You were a sweet child, but that's nothing to go by. I can't bear ugly people," she added. "There," she stood up suddenly and patted my cheek, "run away and dress, and don't forget what I tell you."

I found my room with the assistance of a friendly maid, and soon completed my toilette—my frock was of cream cashmere. I felt afraid to go downstairs by myself, but sat shivering on my bed until the sound of the gong compelled me to venture I reached the hall, and followed a stream of men and women into what I took to be the drawing-room. I gathered a general impression of yellow draperies and family portraits, but had not time to notice anything more closely.

I caught a glimpse of Frankie, in black and silver with scarlet poppies, and was attracted by a dark girl with wonderful eyes and a magnificent pair of diamond ear-rings. Then the gong sounded again and we all moved towards the door. I found myself beside the pink youth, who smiled a welcome, and piloted me to the dining-room.

We sat about half way down the table, opposite Lord Kinross and the girl with the diamond ear-rings. Frankie was at the other end, near to Sir John. I noticed that his lordship seemed very attentive to his neighbour, and hardly cast a glance at Frankie.

"Who is that?" I asked; "the girl next to Lord Kinross, I mean."

"Mary Vernon is the lady's name," replied the youth. "Handsome, eh!"

"Very," I returned. "Lord Kinross also seems to think so."

"That's as it should be," returned my companion; "they're engaged to be married, you know."

The surprise I felt at this piece of intelligence took away my appetite. If Lord Kinross was engaged to Mary Vernon, what did he mean by showing such admiration for my cousin that very afternoon? I was puzzled, and conversation languished for the rest of the repast.

I had a wretched time in the drawing-room after dinner, everyone was talking and laughing, and I felt quite in the cold. At last I spied out a window seat where, sheltered by curtains, I could remain in comfort.

It was very entertaining to watch all that was going on—almost as good as being at a play. After a while the men came up. Sir John and some others surrounded Frankie until Lord Kinross appeared, then they drifted off.

My cousin passed up the room with Kinross towards the conservatory, where they remained some time. Two dowagers commented audibly upon this fact.

"What do you think of *that*?" said the first, glancing after the couple.

The other shrugged her shoulders.

"Mary Vernon is a fool," she answered; "and the Norton woman is as artful as she's high. Still Kinross won't go too far, if Mary is fairly sensible and gives up the cards."

"Is that the trouble?"

"Nothing else. Kinross wouldn't allow a passing tenderness for the Norton to interfere with his marriage, but if Mary doesn't stop gambling there'll be no marriage at all. Kinross is by no means straight-laced, but sets his face against high play."

"I thought Lady Winchin disapproved of it?"

"So she does, but she can't lock her guests in their rooms at night, and"—the lady shrugged and lowered her voice, I caught the words, "after twelve, in the smoke-room, most nights."

"And you think that if Mary doesn't pull up in time the Norton will have a chance—I wonder."

"The Norton's no fool," returned her companion.

"Where does she come from, nobody seems to know much of her?"

"Jamaica, she says. I believe she made the acquaintance of the Vernons' on the voyage home. Mary fell in love with her, and introduced her to Lady Winchin, who followed suit. That's all!"

"And her friend—Fluffy, I believe she calls him?"

"He also hails from Jamaica. He came to see her here, and Lady Winchin asked him to stay. She's so shockingly good-natured—dear Lady Winchin. Take my word for it," the dowager became emphatic, "the Norton's a dangerous woman."

The conversation left me puzzled. I went upstairs to bed soon after, but for a long time lay awake thinking over all that I had heard. At last, worn out with excitement and fatigue, I fell asleep.

It must have been hours later when I woke with a great start, my heart thumping with

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a sudden sense of fear. The house was very still, and the night was dark. I sat up and listened anxiously. The next moment I had sprung out of bed in a panic. In the room under mine were footsteps, voices low and cautious. In such a house, at such an hour there could be but one explanation—*burglars!*

Throwing on my dressing gown, I opened the door, and quite beside myself with fear, rushed downstairs in the direction of the noise.

Outside the smoke-room I came to a sudden pause—the door was half open, the *portière* drawn back. From where I stood I could see what went on inside.

On a table in the centre of the room were scattered cards, little heaps of gold, silver, bank notes, and some loose coins. The game had evidently been interrupted, only two persons retained their seats, the rest were surrounding a tall, handsome blonde, named Mrs. Curtis-Blount. There were six people present, the blonde aforesaid, my cousin Frankie and Miss Mary Vernon, Fluffy, the pink youth, and a man in eyeglasses, whom, the pink boy had told me, was a special friend of Mrs. Curtis-Blount's, named Algy Tresham. Mary Vernon and Fluffy were at the table.

"Suc hmeanness, "declared Mrs. Curtis-Blount, "I have never met with; you win two hundred from me, Mary, and then declare you're going to stop play for the night. It's downright shabby not to give me a chance of winning back the money."

"You've taken a good deal more than two hundred from me," retorted Mary. "You've no cause to grumble on that score. I want the two hundred to pay Dick Carew my losses at baccarat. Thank goodness that is the last of my gaming debts. After to-night I shan't play at all for high stakes."

Mrs. Curtis-Blount sneered.

"Oh, if you haven't any money it's a different matter. Seems rather sharp practice though to play high when you haven't the means to settle up."

"Who says I haven't the means?" retorted Mary angrily. "Here, I'll stake a monkey. Go one better if you can," and she glared fiercely at the blonde.

"Thank you, I'm not taking any I.O.U.'s," said that lady sharply.

"For shame, Vi," interposed my cousin. "Mary's name is good for a monkey any day."

"Not without Kinross to back it," retorted Mrs. Curtis-Blount.

Mary Vernon started to her feet.

"I am responsible for my own debts," she cried, "and always have been. I've said I'll stake a monkey and I'll keep my word. There!" She took out her diamond ear-rings and dropped them on the table, "I suppose you'll admit they're worth that, and more?"

Mrs. Curtis-Blount nodded and drew near, stretching out her hand towards the jewels on the table.

Frankie quickly interposed.

"You mustn't dream of such a thing, Mary!" she cried, snatching the diamonds from the table. "Think what a risk you're running. It's not *only* the value, if you should lose them, Kinross——" She paused and whispered eagerly in Mary's ear.

"I don't care," said the girl doggedly. "I've said I'll stake them, and I'll keep my word."

"Mary," said my cousin, "for Heaven's sake consider!" She laid her hand upon the girl's shoulder trying to dissuade her.

"I am going to do it!" was all that Mary said.

In despair my cousin turned away, still holding the jewels, hoping perhaps, that at the last moment Mary would change her mind.

Frankie stood against the mantelpiece, leaning her head upon her arms, her handkerchief pressed to her face.

"Come, hand them over, Frankie; don't be silly!"

"Oh, you are mad—*mad!*" cried my cousin, and, with a quick movement dropped the jewels in front of Mary.

"That's right!" said the girl. "Now, Fluffy, deal!" and she handed him the cards.

"One moment"—it was the man in glasses who interrupted—"do I understand that Miss Vernon proposes to stake these earrings in lieu of £500?"

"Certainly, why do you ask?" said Mary.

He stooped over the table, closely examining the jewels. After a short scrutiny, he stood up and gave himself a little shake.

"Well?" said Mary. "Well?"

"These are not diamonds," he said coldly, "they are paste."

"*Paste!*" everyone shouted. "*Paste?*"

"Yes; marvellous imitations, I grant you, but imitations only. I have spent too long a time in the Kimberley mines not to know a sham from the real thing."

"You can't know what you are saying!" cried Frankie. "Don't you see you're implying that Miss Vernon is guilty of fraud?"

"Can't help that," replied the man in glasses. "Facts are facts, and paste is paste; ask any jeweller, he'll tell you the same!" and he pointed contemptuously at the earrings.

He spoke quietly but convincingly; even Frankie seemed persuaded.

"Mary, what does it mean?" she cried. "Why did you do it? Have you sold the real stones, or pawned them or what? Why didn't you tell me if you wanted money? For Heaven's sake can't you speak? Don't sit like that. *Mary.*"

But Mary Vernon was too dazed to answer. She sat resting her head upon her arm, her eyes dull, her attitude one of despair. At last she roused herself.

"I swear I have not touched the earrings since Lord Kinross gave them to me!" she declared.

"Kinross!" repeated Frankie. "Oh, Mary, what will he say now?"

At that moment attention was distracted by the sound of footsteps hurrying down the hall. Some one passed me in the darkness, paused for a moment, then crossed the threshold of the smoke-room.

A woman's cry, a short, sharp call of "Hartland," then silence and the shutting of a door.

Lord Kinross had come to answer for himself.

* * * * *

The next morning there was much gossip and many rumours at "The Moat." Lord Kinross had been summoned to town on business and left by an early train. Mary Vernon went later "owing to the illness of her mother." Though everyone accepted the explanations, nobody believed them. It was well known that Lord Kinross had broken off the engagement with Mary Vernon.

Rumour had it that his lordship would have forgiven his sweetheart had she confessed to changing the jewels in her earrings, but that her persistent denial angered him and finally hardened him. Had she confessed he would have pardoned all.

Others hinted that Mary had nothing to confess, and was a deeply injured individual.

Amidst all these excursions and alarums, Frankie pursued the even tenor of her way. She smiled at the men, ignored the women, and enslaved Sir John more than ever. She wrote frequently to Mary, and exchanged letters with Lord Kinross.

About three weeks after the memorable card-party our visit drew to a close. Frankie intended to take a house in town for

the season, putting up at the Cecil till she found one to suit her.

The day before we left "The Moat," Fluffy, who had gone back to town, sent Frankie a present. We were in the drawing-room after dinner when it arrived—a tiny parcel by a special messenger.

"Something good, I expect!" said Mrs. Curtis-Blount; "let's see what it is, Frankie."

My cousin seemed disinclined to examine the packet just then, and only yielded after much teasing and coaxing.

"Fluffy's always sending me something or other," she said, "He's really very silly."

By this time, most of the women and some of the men had gathered round her.

"Hurry up, Mrs. Norton," said the pink youth, "we're all expectant."

Frankie flushed and her fingers trembled as she fumbled with the spring of a tiny jewel-case.

"You make me nervous!" she declared, with a little laugh.

The next moment the contents of the case were on view. Carefully embedded in blue velvet lay two golden hat-pins with diamond heads.

We all gave an exclamation of delight.

"Too sweet for words!" said one woman.

"Exquisite!" murmured another. "You are very lucky, Mrs. Norton!"

"Very fine stones!" remarked Tresham, the man in glasses taking up the pins. "They seem curiously familiar to me, somehow. Why, by all that's extraordinary, they're identical in shape and colour with Mary Vernon's paste earrings. It is as if they had been copied. It's like a conjuring trick, paste one minute, diamonds the next. Upon my word it beats Maskelyne and Cook!"

Frankie smiled. "I suppose quite a number of diamonds are cut after one pattern," she said, "and of course the same designs are used for paste."

"Of course," agreed Tresham; "it's merely a coincidence. Still, it's curious."

Frankie made no reply. The pins were replaced in the case, and the incident was closed.

But all night long I puzzled over the affair. "Paste one minute, diamonds the next!" Tresham's words haunted me. I sat up breathless with a sudden thought. It was no mere coincidence that caused the diamonds and the paste so closely to resemble each other. This was the explanation:

Mary Vernon's diamonds had been changed for paste. The thief had sold the diamonds, which, by some strange chance had reappeared at "The Moat," as the heads of the golden hat-pins. And they—I fell back faint and dizzy—the diamonds set in the hat-pins were Mary Vernon's.

And the pins were in the possession of my cousin Frankie.

[The reader will no doubt have suspected the truth—that Mrs. Norton, during the card scene, had changed the paste diamonds for the real ones. Fluffy was, of course, her accomplice. Next week tells of the clever way in which Mrs. Norton robs an American millionaire.]

TWO LITTLE KEEPSAKES.

A Pathetic Tale of a Great Loss and its Consolation.

The doctor lingered. He glanced at the man who sat staring through the blurred, unwashed window-glass into the noisy street—staring at nothing. The man's face was full of the dumb grief of the uncultured, the grief that is dumb not because it would not, but because it cannot, speak; the grief that needs the tenderest sympathy in the world. It was hurting the man; and the doctor understood, and lingered in silence.

The man turned his head restlessly; and the doctor, sitting on the side of the tumbled bed, with its shabby coverings, lifted in his arms a small bundle of grey flannel that lay among the unattractive pillows. He loosened the folds of the flannel and gently touched the little pink face thus revealed. The baby stirred and smiled in its sleep. The doctor noted the dimple in its cheek, and its fringe of yellow hair. He again glanced at the man's averted face, sullen and hard in its grief.

"What have you named your little girl?" was his unexpected question. The doctor was a young man, but it happened that he understood the man's sorrow for his wife, so lately dead, who had left the baby, with its dimple and its fringe of yellow hair, and its baby girlhood, for a keepsake, for a farewell gift. He offered his sympathy very gradually and tenderly.

"Named her? I dunno; don't care. If it hadn't been for her, my wife wouldn't have died!" He met the doctor's serious brown eyes with a defiant stare, which the doctor quite understood. "I don't want to see her: I don't want to talk about her!"

The doctor looked at the baby. "It is a pity not to name her soon. She is such a nice little girl, and she has a dimple in one cheek. My little girl has a dimple in one cheek. It is the prettiest way for a little girl to have dimples, I think—just one in each cheek." He looked at the child's cheek, but he was thinking more of the man than the little girl's dimple.

"An' 'ave you a little girl?" asked the man, with his face turned still to the window.

"Yes. Didn't I really tell you?" said the doctor. "She is the dearest little girl in the world! There couldn't possibly be another one half so nice."

"An' what is it that makes her so out o' the common? Likely as not there's others as fine," remarked the man, with more interest than the doctor expected.

"There couldn't be another so nice to me," said the doctor, turning his eyes to the man. "You see, her mother died when she was even a tinier baby than your little girl, and she is the only child her mother and I had, and she looks like her mother." The doctor's voice was very low. His little girl was not yet three years old, and he had not learnt to speak very often, even to her, of her mother.

The man's face relaxed. "Well, now, an' what's come to

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me came first to you, an' you know how 'tis," he said in wonder.

"Yes," said the doctor, "I know how it is. Yes, the same thing came to me." He brought his lips very closely together, and then he looked at the other man's baby girl, and smiled, and said: "And your little girl has yellow hair and a dimple in one cheek—why don't you look at it?—just as mine has."

The man looked for a moment at the baby; then his face darkened and he said: "If it hadn't been for your little girl I suppose your——"

"Yes," the doctor interrupted, "I know what you are going to say."

He bowed his head and was silent for a few moments. Then he lifted his eyes and said: "Come here and hold your little girl, and I will tell you about my sun-flowers."

"Sunflowers?"

"Yes, now you hold her while I tell you. Yes, that's the way to hold her. Now if you touch her cheek, she will smile in her sleep and you can see her dimple. See?"

The man held the baby in an awkward bundle, and fearfully touched her face. He smiled when the tiny dent came into the pink cheek.

"Is a dimple such a nice thing for a girl to 'ave?" he asked the doctor.

"Very nice," said the doctor gravely.

"I ain't never held the baby afore," said the man. "You are the first person to notice the dimple," he continued, doubtfully.

"Perhaps no one else has seen her smile," said the doctor.

"I ain't held her," the man repeated, unheeding the doctor's explanation of the general ignorance, regarding the baby's dimple, "because ——"

"I suppose you were afraid of dropping her," the doctor interposed. "I used to be."

"No," the man said honestly, "it wasn't that. I didn't want to see her, because if it hadn't been for her *she* wouldn't have died. Ain't you never felt that way?" he asked the other father, with sudden curiosity.

The doctor's voice had a slight quiver in it when finally he spoke. Had he understood less keenly the meaning of the other man's bereavement, he perhaps might not have replied.

With the sympathy of a similar sorrow and a similar consolation, he had heard of this man's utter grief and of his unreasoning resentment toward the child, to whose life the mother had given her own. The doctor had learned much in the three years of his little girl's life, and he had come to tell it to the other man. He found it harder to tell than he had expected, but he did not shrink.

"At first I think I did," he said gently, "and then I saw how much my little girl's mother had left to comfort me. She had left me her own little girl. She —couldn't make up for——"

"Ah, no!" the man murmured.

"She couldn't do that, but she could do a great deal," went on the doctor. "You see, she needed my care. It's the best comfort in the world really to be needed. She helped me to see how much I might do—for her and for other people. She helped me to see that I might, perhaps, make myself worth the—the gift of love I had been given; and then, she is my wife's own little child—and mine," the doctor concluded more simply.

He waited for some comment, but the other man was looking into the face of his little girl. "Do you see what I mean?" the doctor asked.

"Well, I dunno, I dunno," the man said, but he wrapped the grey flannel more carefully round the baby and touched the pink cheek in which the one dimple hid. The doctor smiled; the other man was beginning to understand.

"An' what'd be her name?" he asked.

"That's just what I was going to tell you," the doctor replied. "Her name is Clytie—for the maiden of olden times, who looked at the sun so often that she was changed into a sunflower. You see I always called my wife Clytie because —because she was the bright glory of my life; she was truly a flower of sunlight. My mother and my sisters think Clytie a queer name for my daughter, but you see she is my other flower; she has made the sun shine still in my life."

The doctor again paused, but the other man did not speak; his eyes were bent with new interest upon the pink face of his daughter. The doctor did not hesitate now to offer the full measure of his sympathy. "I have told you these things," he said, "because I was sorry when I heard of your loss, because I understand how you feel, and because I know how bright a sunflowe rthe little child left by the mother, may be to its father; how much it can help the loneliness."

The doctor concluded the telling of his lesson with unfaltering faith in the other man's power to learn it. It was this simple greatness in dealing with the other person; this unfailing belief in the strong bond of a common humanity uniting the rich and the poor, the high and the less high, that had made the first appeal for the doctor to his first sunflower, and caused her to turn to him her bright face. It was sufficiently strong to hold the other man's attention, to make him look with different eyes at his baby.

"An' is yours so much nicer than mine?" the man anxiously asked. "I don't believe she is!"

The doctor laughed softly. He knew now that he had helped the man. "She is the nicest little girl in the world, I think," he said. "Perhaps I can't judge impartially, but she seems nicer to me than any other little girl could be."

"An' that's because she's yours," said the man indulgently. "Now, I'm thinking if we put them together, mine'd be pretty near yours, let alone bein' a little ahead." He had forgotten that he had not wanted to see his baby, that he had refused to look at her.

The doctor remembered, and he said, soberly. "We shall see. When your little girl is a little older you must bring her to see us, and then we will compare the two sunflowers."

"An' it's Clytie yours is named? Well, now, mine'll be Nora. It was *her* name, and it's what I called her." He looked at the doctor for approval.

"Yes," the doctor assented. "It means for you what Clytie means for me."

"Ah, did you see that dimple?" said the man as the baby stirred. "I'm thinkin' your little girl's ain't much better than that."

"You shall see for yourself," said the doctor with a smile. "I must go now and finish my calls, or I won't get home before my sunflower is in bed," he added, seeing that the other father no longer needed him."

The man laid the baby among the pillows, and went with the doctor to the door, and down the first flight of narrow stairs.

"Good day to you," he said. "Really you was kind to come—an' you knowin' how 'tis."

"I came because I do know," the young doctor said. "Good afternoon, and a good night to your sunflower." He shook the man's hand, and ran down the remaining flights of stairs.

The other man went back to the sleeping baby. He stood gazing at its tiny form. He touched its cheek, and the baby smiled and moved one hand from beneath the flannel coverings. The man touched the little hand, and it softly closed around his finger.

"Well, now, if you'd see that!" he said. "Ah, the doctor was right; she is my wife's own girl, and a fine one too with one dimple! Sunflower is a good name for her. But the doctor was conceited enough about his girl, and I'll bet mine's every bit as fine. And it's *her* little girl, yes and mine. Ah, that dimple.

L. Stadd.

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By Right of Deed.

A Love Story of To-Day.

By Way of Explanation.

Exactly seven years ago, persons of means and position themselves, on the "Tontine" with the object of purchasing for their own collective use and benefit the five hundred ton steam yacht, *Trantymere*. The deed of incorporation contained one especially peculiar clause—viz., "that the two sexes shall be equally represented on the membership roll; and, that the member, male or female, who shall, without due notice given (save and except as a passenger on board the said steam yacht *Trantymere*) leave the kingdom (which shall, for the purposes of this deed, be taken to mean the British Isles, as limited by their waters) shall, so far as the *Trantymere* Tontine is concerned, be deemed and accounted dead; his or her proprietary interest in the said steam yacht *Trantymere* from that date ceasing and determining, such proprietary interest reverting to, and for distribution among the surviving members. It is also provided that any member dying while on board the yacht *Trantymere* aforesaid, is hereby empowered to appoint and nominate a new member of either sex in his or her place, and that, by virtue of this deed, such appointment and nomination shall hold good up to and including the natural termination of this association."

CHAPTER I.

The Mysterious "Number Nine."

"*SS. Trantymere,*
"*Off Naples.*

"My Darling Vena,—I am about sick of this with a big S! I wish to goodness that I had never heard of this miserable 'Tontine.' Can't think what possessed me to join it. I suppose, at twenty-one, I was young and foolish. There isn't one of the others (except perhaps old Titherage—you know millionaire Titherage, the Napoleon of Capel Court—) whom one can decently associate with. They have money—presumably—and society indorses them, but, all the same, they are cads, both the men *and* the women.

"I'd throw up the whole thing and come home, if it wasn't that poor old Titherage was taken seriously ill this morning, and has asked me to remain by him. Poisoned macaroni, says our own medico, whose opinion, however, isn't worth much from my point of view.

"There is likely to be a lively time on board should anything happen, as appears very probable, for the women have each her particular pet ready for recommendation to the passing member at the physcological moment. It's absolutely hideous. There is that Willoughby woman; she seems to me to have some underhand scheme on; but she's too smart to let me see her hand. I've almost made up my mind in the event of Titherage's death, to cut the whole concern, and forfeit my share.

"You see, dear, I'm the heir, and you are the governess. Between each, in the present state of things social, there are apt to arise barriers, not of their own making. Folks are inclined to be so officious, aren't they? And yet, darling, I fancy, somehow, that you will be able to hold your own, for my sake, and in spite of kind (?) friends.

"Am sending this to Armadale's care. More to-morrow. Shall look for letter from you to-night.

"Dearest love from yours eternally, "Denys."

"Ah! Mr. Vohyle! I have just caught you! Quite the devoted lover!"

Denys Vohyle had no need to turn his head in order to identify the speaker; Lady Di Willoughby's sickly-sweet tones were not to be mistaken.

"You flatter me Lady Diana! Devotion, other than to myself, may hardly, I fancy, be placed to my credit."

"No? Well, I must beg leave to think otherwise, though, of course, I should not dream of even wishing to know your secret."

Denys Vohyle, who had sought the solitude of the smoke, room, that he might write his letter to Vena Holt undisturbed-scarcely knew how to meet my lady's method of attack.

"Number one" on the roll of members (of whom six had, in the course of the Tontine's seven years' existence, gone over to the majority) this was by no means her first voyage on the *Trantymere*.

Ever since the day of leaving Southampton this spinster daughter of the well-nigh impoverished Earl of Heatherfield, had pestered young Vohyle with languishing, and altogether unwelcome, attentions.

Lady Diana Willoughby was, in a way, good-looking, but of the tailor-made, masculine type.

This mixed somewhat oddly with the sigh-away style she invariably adopted when in Denys Vohyle's company.

There were very good reasons why she should keenly desire to bind Sir Hector Vohyle's heir to her chariot-wheels. He was rich, would in the near future be still more rich.

She it was who had incepted the idea of the Tontine, investing in it her last remaining capital of a few hundreds in the desperate hope of an ultimately good dividend in the shape of a wealthy husband.

For the first few days of this particular trip she had hesitated between the baronet's son and the city Crœsus. The latter, however, cold, taciturn, unapproachable, gave her no encouragement, was even rude to her when she tentatively tried her arts and wiles upon him.

Nothing remained for her, therefore, but to combine her forces in laying siege—in forlorn-hope fashion—to Denys Vohyle.

Up to the ship's arrival at Naples, she had made little or no progress in this direction, had, in fact, to acknowledge to tantamount defeat.

All along she had shrewdly suspected the existence of a prior attachment. Now, from the little that had caught her eye in Denys' letter to his sweetheart (she was by no means scrupulous in this respect) she was firmly convinced that there was a lady in the case.

That she herself was a good six years older than Denys

Vohyle did not so much as trouble her in the least. It only made her the more energetically enterprising in her matrimonial operations.

Denys was about to reply in some sort to her last remark, when an urgent message was brought him by the steward, to the effect that Mr. Titherage had suddenly become worse and had asked for him.

Had he but thought twice he would have bundled up his papers anyhow, and not have absent-mindedly rushed out, leaving his open letter to Vena Holt on the smoke-room table, for anyone to read.

That he did so leave it, furnished Lady Di with an irresistible opportunity.

She was not slow to avail herself of it.

Snatching up the letter she deliberately read it through from beginning to end, laid it down again, and went to her own cabin, which she shared in company with Mrs. Dunlop, a widow of a certain age, but with a good bank balance.

* * * * *

"Vohyle," said Arnold Titherage, with an effort. 'I have only one thing more to say to you. A little matter, you'll think it, but then, it is connected with a bigger one."

"Well, Mr. Titherage, if it's anything in which I can be of service, you know you may command me."

"Yes, yes! I know that! I know that!" replied the sick man eagerly. "But that's just where it is. I'm not going to tell you everything."

"Why?"

"Never mind why! It's an old man's whim—an old man's whim."

"Oh, of course. I respect your wishes. You are at liberty to tell me just as much or just as little as you please."

"Good boy! Good boy! Now, listen! Didn't you let slip to me once that a certain Vena Holt was very dear to you?"

"Did I?—I suppose I did, if you say so."

"I do say so. Now, I want you, no matter what family opposition you may meet with, to go home as soon as the *Trantymere* reaches Southampton, and straightway marry your sweetheart."

"Yes, but——"

"Is there any just reason why you should not?" asked the dying millionaire.

"No, I cannot say that there is."

"Then, Denis Vohyle, do the right thing, and don't delay bringing the sunshine into Vena Holt's life. Will you promise me?"

"Promise! Of course I will. But don't worry yourself about my little affairs; I want to know if there is not something that I can do for you."

"Just this," the old man said, reaching from under the bedclothes a sealed envelope, and handing it to Denys. "Inside is my nomination for the new 'Number Nine' to succeed me, and also my holograph will.

"Take it, as soon as you arrive in England, to my solicitors, Ashton and Beale, 106, Bedford Row, they will act in both cases."

"Certainly I will do this; but you may get better, and then there will be no need for it."

"Better! No, I shall never be that! When the end comes do for me all that your kind heart would prompt you to do. Vohyle! Did you say Vena!—Vena!—it is a sweet name. You are a good man and will make her a good husband—God bless you!—Vena!—God bless you both."

These were the old millionaire's last words. Immediately after uttering them he fell back upon his pillow—dead.

* * * * *

"Oh, Mr. Vohyle, isn't it sad?" wailed Lady Di. "Of course we—that is—the *Trantymere*, is going home at once?"

"The *Trantymere*, Lady Diana, will sail for England to-night."

"Ah! Dear me! Yes! Well, I am sure you will understand, Mr. Vohyle, but Mrs. Dunlop and I have—er—arranged to go overland to Brindisi, and thence by mail to Southampton."

"I suppose, Lady Diana, you have your reason?"

"Well, neither Mrs. Dunlop nor I care to—to go back with poor, dear Mr. Titherage. I am sure you will understand."

"I cannot say, Lady Diana, that I do understand—quite; but of course you know your own business best."

"Naturally!" retorted the other, in a nettled tone; she could not but notice the young man's attitude as towards herself. Then, recollecting that there was still something that she wanted to know. "Mr. Vohyle," she said, with a bad imitation of her old sweetness of manner, "we—Mrs. Dunlop and I, that is—do so want you to tell us—well—we feel sure Mr. Titherage *must* have told *you*."

"Yes, Lady Diana, what is it? If it is anything that I can conscientiously repeat, I will do so with pleasure."

"Well, then, Mr. Vohyle—who—who is to be the new 'Number Nine'?"

"That, Lady Diana, is, I regret to say, something that I am not in a position to enlighten you upon. Mr. Titherage has made the nomination, which has been forwarded, or rather will be forwarded, to his solicitor in due course."

"Then you don't know?"

"No, Lady Diana. I am as ignorant as you are who is now 'Number Nine.'"

CHAPTER II.

LOVE THE LEVELLER.

"ARMADALE, old chap, you are 'a sight for sair een'!" cried Denys Vohyle, as he sprang out of the Southampton train at Waterloo. "It seems ages since I saw you!"

"It's just three months."

"Seems more like three years! You're looking splendid, Ned!"

"More than I can say for you!" growled Ned Armadale, a fair young giant, hailing from the Middle Temple. "I don't think you are up to sample, young man," he went on critically. "Why, you've lost a stone, if you've lost an ounce, and you're the colour of—of brown holland!"

"Thanks, Ned, you're awfully good! But never mind my appearance; tell me, how is Vena? Of course you've seen her lately?"

"I saw her a fortnight ago, when she came to see if there was a letter from you. Since then. I—well—I've lost sight of her."

"Good Heavens! Lost sight of her! Come along! get a hansom, and let us get to your place!"

Armadale would tell his friend nothing till he had him in his third floor snuggery in Hare Court.

"Now then, Ned! What's the matter?"

"Steady, old fellow! steady! There has been a little upset, I fancy, at Selwood Court. Sir Hector and Lady Vohyle, so far as I can make out from old Hills (the butler, you know, who came up to town specially to tell me), have, within the past ten days, been informed by someone of your engagement to Vena Holt."

"Why, nobody knew of it except you and old Hills himself."

"That's the curious part of it! I asked Hills if anybody had been to the Court—any stranger, I mean—but he said no. Obviously, therefore, this same someone has been indulging in a little scandalous correspondence. Hills is to come up again this afternoon if there is anything fresh."

"But, Vena, Ned—where is she? What has become of her?"

"That's just what I cannot tell you."

"Can't tell me! Isn't she still at the Court?"

"No; she left there at a moment's notice a week ago yesterday."

"And no one knows her destination?"

"No one. Hullo! wonder who that is! Chinks"—to the boy clerk in the outer office—"didn't you hear that knock? Open the door!"

A lady's voice was asking for Mr. Armadale.

"Why, Denys, what's the trouble?"

The barrister might well ask, for his visitor had flung himself past and over him, making headlong for the outer door.

A little shriek, a succession of endearing phrases with punctuations, and re-enter Denys Vohyle, with one arm round the shoulders of the fairest specimen of girlhood to be found in London or out of it.

They were like a couple of children, these two. She, alternately laughing and crying; while he, his face wreathed with happy smiles, could not take his eyes off her for very gladness.

"But, Denys," asked Vena, in breathless wonderment, "how is it that you have arrived without writing to tell me? I haven't had a line from you for nearly a month."

"Not heard? Why, I wrote you from Naples—twice! Once, with a cable, from Gibraltar, and again from Southampton last night."

"I have heard nothing."

"Ned, there has been some confounded trickery at work! I'm sure of it. Except the Southampton wire—which I sent myself—all my other letters and cables to Vena I intrusted to Tarver, the steward, to post and send."

"What do you think—that he has played double?"

"I remember now that, more than once, I caught him in deep confab with Lady Di Willoughby; the last time seeing money pass from her to him. I thought nothing much of it at the time, looking upon it as the mere giving and receiving a tip."

"Now?"

"Now I am positive that Tarver, at my precious lady's instance, has sold me—for a price!"

"And I've been imagining all these weeks," said Vena plaintively, "all sorts of horrible things about you! That Lady Di, Denys, must be a bad woman. What can her motive be? Perhaps it is she who has written to Sir Hector, and——"

"Why, of course!" shouted Denys, his hands clenching and unclenching, as if longing to try conclusions with somebody. "She came suddenly upon me once while I was writing to you, Vena, and being, as I believe, perfectly unscrupulous, gathered from what she could oversee that you and I, dear, were on more than friendly terms. From that to anonymous letter-writing is an easy inference."

"Look here, you two!" here interrupted Armadale, "I'm going out and will leave you to your palaver."

"All right, old chap!" said Denys, "don't shift for us. I have, I just recollect, to go as far as Bedford Row, after I have bestowed Vena somewhere till I come back. Poor old Titherage's matter, you know."

"Oh! ah! His will, and so on?"

"Yes. I promised to deliver the packet at once on my arrival in town."

A hansom soon conveyed the re-united lovers to the Chatham and Dover Hotel on the Viaduct, where Denys made arrangements for Vena to have lunch and to wait his return.

"I've something very serious to talk to you about," he whispered, as he left her.

"Serious?" she said, a trifle apprehensively.

"You shall answer that question yourself," he returned smilingly; "but I think I can promise that it will not quite break your heart."

* * * * *

Messrs. Ashton and Beale were among the oldest and most respectable legal firms of Bedford Row.

Ashton was of the old school; Beale of the new.

It was the junior and up-to-date partner whom Denys saw.

"Well, Mr. Vohyle, we've been expecting this for some days. You don't know the contents of either the will, or the paper nominating to Mr. Titherage's share in the *Trantymere* Tontine?"

"No."

"I thought not! Now, would it be convenient for you and—and—ah, yes! Miss Vena Holt, to attend at this office, at this hour, on this day week?"

"I don't quite understand!" said, Denys, in genuine astonishment. "Certainly I will come, if need be; but Miss Holt—she is exclusively a—a—friend of my own, and, as I take it, altogether outside any business connected with the late Mr. Titherage."

"Perhaps so! perhaps so! And yet, if you will so far humour me—or us, I should say—speaking for Ashton and Beale—as to bring Miss Holt with you, I—we, that is—will take it as a personal favour."

Denys left the lawyer, more bewildered than ever, but with mind firmly made up as to two courses of action. To arrange with Vena for an immediate marriage, and to discover, if possible, the rights—or wrongs— of the mischief at Selwood Court.

An hour later found the pair strolling in Kensington Gardens.

"What is your objection, dear," he was saying, "to marrying me now, and letting me face the storm—if there should be one afterwards?"

"Of course I know that you seek to do all this for my sake and comfort, Denys, dear, but what, I think, you do not clearly see is, that there is just a bare possibility of loss of friends and fortune for you, and I cannot bring myself to incur the responsibility of that."

"You? It is I who would be responsible."

"It is good of you, dear, and like you to say so; but, perhaps, I can see better than you, and to better purpose."

"You love me, Vena, don't you?" he asked her abruptly.

"It is because I do, that I hesitate to do as you wish."

"Don't hesitate, darling! Let me call upon your friend, Mrs. Deane, with whom you are staying, and make arrangements for a quiet wedding on Friday."

"You know Sir Hector and Lady Vohyle's objection," she said, ignoring his pleading. "Only a governess" is a stumbling-block your father and mother cannot get over.

"I see now that I was wrong in the first instance to consent to secrecy and practical deceit. You are certainly responsible for that, Denys."

"But in the name of fortune, child, I am old enough to act for myself!"

"Perhaps, but are you wise enough? Love may be a leveller, but society doesn't think so — and — and the governess, at whatever cost to herself, is forced to doubt the truth of the proverb."

For long she stood out against giving her consent, alluring though the temptation was, and it was only when his persistent protestations, and passionate appeals to her love for him, bore down her opposition by sheer force of a determination not to take "No" for an answer, that she bid him have his way.

"You will regret it," she said half-tearfully, but with a light in her eyes that spoke volumes.

"Never!" he answered her, as they turned out by the little gate, into the Bayswater Road. "Never! Nor," he added, as he stood with one foot on the step of the cab, after he had put her into it, "shall *you*, dear, if it costs me my life!"

CHAPTER III.

How the *Trantymere* Tontine Dissolved Itself.

When "Mr. and Mrs. Denys Vohyle" were announced, both the partners in Ashton and Beale looked at one another across the table, and smiled meaningly.

Denys introduced his wife.

"How very odd!" remarked the junior partner. "I—that is—we almost expected this happy consummation; and I—that is—we congratulate you heartily, Mr. and Mrs. Denys Vohyle!"

While courteously acknowledging the lawyer's good wishes, Denys could not help telling himself that Mr. Beale's habit of continually expecting something was peculiar, not to say eccentric.

This constituted Mr. Beale's share in the morning's business.

"I believe, Mr. Vohyle," said the senior partner, "that you and the late Mr. Titherage were very friendly?"

"Only during the last trip," Denys replied. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Titherage and I met then for the first time, although we had been for seven years fellow members of the *Trantymere* Tontine."

"Just so! Now, before disclosing to you and to Mrs. Vohyle (here the old gentleman bent his head in old-fashioned homage in Vena's direction) the contents of Mr. Arnold Titherage's will, and—and the other communication, it will be as well, perhaps, to give you our report with regard to the little matter you placed in our hands five days ago."

This referred to inquiries Denys had requested Ashton and Beale to make on the subject of the anonymous letter to Sir Hector Vohyle, and affairs at Selwood Court generally.

Until he found out something definite, he had decided to postpone a visit to his father's house.

"In the first place," continued Mr. Ashton, "we have discovered, through the man Tarver, that Lady Diana Willoughby wrote that letter."

"I thought so," was all that Denys remarked upon this.

"Then, it seems, I am sorry to say, that Sir Hector and Lady Vohyle are alike implacable, and determined not to agree to anything you may be likely to propose in the matrimonial way. That determination (here he again bowed ceremoniously to Vena) is, however, I may say, now null and void."

"That is so," said Denys grimly.

"Thirdly, I am confirmed in my opinion, after a perusal of the *Trantymere* Tontine deed of corporation, that by leaving the ship at Naples, and travelling *via* Brindisi to England, Lady Diana Willoughby and Mrs. Dunlop contravened a vital condition provided in the said deed, and thereby rendered themselves, so far as the Tontine is concerned, to be accounted dead; and therefore out of membership and forfeit."

"Then I and the new 'Number Nine' are the sole survivors of the association?"

"Precisely."

"But who is the new member?"

"That, Mr. Vohyle, I am now about to communicate to you. Mr. Beale, be good enough to pass me over the Titherage papers."

"But, Mr. Ashton," asked Vena, "don't you think that I, as a quite uninterested party to anything Mr. Titherage may have said or done, ought to leave you gentlemen to discuss the business among yourselves."

"Pardon me, my dear madam, but you will best consult your own interests by remaining, if you will so do us the honour."

"Oh, certainly! I only imagined that, as a woman, I might possibly be in the way."

"That, my dear Mrs. Vohyle, would be impossible," returned the old gentleman, with another courtly inclination of the head.

"First, then, this nomination to a share (known as 'number nine') in the *Trantymere* Tontine. Mr. Titherage's words are few and to the point. He says, 'I hereby nominate and appoint Vena Holt, spinster, now or sometime of Selwood Court, in Horley, Surrey, as full and free owner of my "number nine" share in the association known as the *Trantymere* Tontine, with all rights and privileges appertaining to the same.' This is duly signed and witnessed, and considering that the yacht is worth, I find, something like twenty thousand pounds, I must congratulate Mrs. Vohyle and yourself in possessing so fine a property."

"Vena! You 'number nine,' I cannot understand it!"

"And I am sure I cannot," said Vena herself. "We shall find presently that it is all a mistake."

"I think not," said the old lawyer. "But that is not all. By the terms of this his last will and testament (a holograph document, I may say, but I may also state perfectly drawn up in a legal sense) 'Arnold Titherage, late of 17, Draper's Gardens, Throgmorton Street, E.C., stockbroker, gives and bequeaths everything he may die possessed of, viz., money, shares, stock, house property, and household effects, to Vena Vohyle, *née* Holt, for her sole use and benefit, all to be at her own disposal.' Mr. Titherage concludes the document by saying that he does this because he has found one man in the world who is worthy of both good fortune and a good wife. He asks you, Mr. Vohyle, to forgive his whim, that you should take your fortune at your wife's hand."

Vena steals a hand into one of her husband's.

"I think that is all," said Mr. Ashton, with a twinkle in his eye. "But when, Mr. Vohyle, you and Mrs. Vohyle have gone home, and talked this over, I shall be only too pleased to see you at an early date with regard to the winding up of Mr. Titherage's estate. I may say, however, that, at a rough estimate, it will probably come out at a little over a million sterling."

* * * * *

By agreement between the two surviving members of the *Trantymere* Tontine, the association was dissolved; the ship, renamed the *Vena*, passing into the private possession of Denys Vohyle, who contemplates, with his lovely wife, and their friend, Ned Armadale, a long Mediterranean cruise during the next few months ensuing.

There are signs of relenting at Selwood Court, but Denys is firm, that short of complete and absolute recognition of his wife, reconciliation is out of the question.

A noticeable feature soon after the departure of the *Vena* from Southampton were two toasts at the first day's dinner table.

The first, proposed by Denys, was "Arnold Titherage, in memory."

This silently acknowledged, Ned Armadale sprang to his feet, and gave "'Number Nine,' and God bless her!"

And Vena—well, she did not know whether to laugh or to cry—she only knew that she had realised the meaning of true, unalloyed happiness.

Ralph Enderby.

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MY FRIEND HARDY.

A Humorous Story of a Rivalry and How it Ended.

I OFTEN wondered then, and have often wondered since, whatever caused me to live with Hardy. A man more opposed to my tastes and opposite to me it would have been hard to find.

Hardy was a self-sufficient prig, with his smugly, respectable bank clerk air and his attempts at art which would have tried a far stronger constitution than mine. Still I lived with him, and on the whole got on with him very well. He was harmless, if annoying at times, and though many times I have (driven to desperation by his nauseating opinion of himself) looked for some weapon by which to rid myself for ever of his presence, I believe I liked him, and should no doubt have gone on doing so had it not been for an incident that occurred which cured me for ever of any friendly feeling which I might have towards him.

Hardy and I lodged in the same house. We had two bed sitting-rooms on the first floor and a common dining-room below. Hardy had the back and I had the front room. I used to feel rather strongly on this point, as Hardy's window overlooked the orchards, whereas mine faced the road and the neighbours opposite, which was not nearly so pleasant an outlook.

However, Fate sometimes arranges even lodgings, and so it fell out.

I was standing by my window engaged on some mechanical experiment, when chancing to raise my eyes, I saw framed in the ivy of the window opposite one of the most charming sights I had ever seen.

It may be needless to explain it was a feminine sight. I took the blow-pipe from my mouth and looked again. The charming vision was evidently engaged upon the task of putting on her hat.

As each hat pin stabbed its way through the mysterious edifice I became more engrossed, and when she finally put on her gloves and disappeared, I reached for my hat and prepared to follow, come what might. Luckily I recollected myself in time, and instead of behaving after the manner of Hardy (as I told myself) I craned my neck to watch her dainty little figure down the street, thereby tearing the landlady's curtain, and involving myself in a lecture and an increased bill at the end of the week.

After she had vanished I returned to my blow-pipe and wondered where she had gone, when she would return, what was her name, and who she was? To all of which questions, I naturally received no replies.

It was strange.

I had never seen her before, and yet her little, old-fashioned window so exactly faced mine that I felt it impossible that she could have lived opposite for long and I not noticed her.

I resolved to push investigations with masculine promptitude. But Mrs. Gould, the landlady, was singularly blank on the subject.

She "'adn't seen no young ladies over the way, didn't believe there wasn't none neither. Mr. and Mrs. Brown had lived there so long as she could remember, and if I didn't believe her I'd best ask Mrs. Phelps, as did the washin' for 'em nine year come next July; because it was true, and no, they never 'ad no daughters that might come 'ome from school, and it wasn't likely as two old people would 'ave young flighty girls stayin' with 'em. They wasn't that sort, they was chapel people, and didn't mix with the neighbours, as was mostly church-goin', like herself, thank Gawd, and right thinkin' folk, *if* a bit 'arsh."

This was all the information I could gather, so I returned non-plussed, to the blow-pipe once more with some wrath, thereby blowing too hard, passing the pumice stone and burning my thumb.

I said nothing of my discovery to Hardy, though. He might, with the effrontery peculiar to little men, have scraped acquaintance with my unknown charmer, thereby spoiling the whole romance, for I had begun already to look upon it as a romance.

Next day I saw her go out with her golf sticks. The same afternoon Hardy came home early from the Bank, and as we sat at tea he remarked:

"Some rather pretty girls about this place, Clifford, have you seen them?"

"No, can't say I have," I replied, deep in the *Mechanic's Journal*.

"Ah, my boy, I notice them—they notice me, I suppose that accounts for it."

I did not trouble to raise my eyes.

"People do look at a scarecrow as a rule," I replied drily.

"Ha, ha," he cackled, in his thin, conceited tones. "I've noticed they play golf a lot, too. I've joined the club."

"The dickens you have!" I responded, nettled. "What on earth for?"

"My boy, it's only right to lend yourself for the benefit of the town. Men, you know, are at a premium; therefore I consider it part of my social duty to join the club," he replied.

I glowered darkly at him. Could he by chance have discovered my divinity on the opposite side of the road? But no, his face had its bland smile (which in Hardy was a leer *I* thought), and he was evidently quite unconscious of my scrutiny.

"I should have thought it more of a kindness had you kept out of the way. Ladies have been known to faint at less hideous sights than you in a red coat."

"Why don't you join, then?"

"I hate golf," I rejoined savagely.

"H'm," said the imperturbable Hardy.

"A great lanky form like yours lopping about, especially

She "'adnt seen no young ladies over the way."

when you can't play, is apt to create an unfavourable impression. Luckily that could never fall to my share."

"Get out of my sight, Hardy, you inflated fathead, I can't keep my hands off you much longer!" I cried wrathfully.

"Don't worry, dear boy, I'm off to smoke a pipe in the garden."

"Which garden?" with renewed suspicion.

"Does it matter to you which garden?"

"Yes, it does."

"Why?"

"Mind your own business!" and I slammed out of the room and house thoroughly out of temper with everyone and everything.

Hardy a member of the golf club, and with a chance of meeting my divinity, was unbearable to me. And Hardy *did* join the club and attend it, too; but though he sickened me with descriptions of his conquests of beautiful maidens, not one of them seemed to exactly answer the description of the young lady who occupied my thoughts to the exclusion of everything else.

I used to sit and rack my brains for some method by which I might become acquainted with "Miss Violet." I called her this in my mind, because I had watched her so often search among the green beds in the garden to look for the sweet-scented blossoms, but no one of my few acquaintances seemed to know anything about the Browns, and so at the end of three weeks' ceaseless anxiety I felt I could bear it no longer, and in a burst of confidence I told Hardy. The little man heard me to the end of my recital. He nodded confidentially when I raved over her beauties, he smiled when I detailed my fruitless attempts to know her.

"Fancy you being in love—well there, I should have thought your brain never went further than smelting metals and exercising your lungs on a blow-pipe. It only shows that even the most impossible people fall in love—whereas I——"

"Now, Hardy," I put in with an ominous voice, "I didn't sit down to hear you rhapsodise about yourself. I've got a hammer in my hand remember, and I feel positive one day I shall kill you!"

"Well, well," he continued, disregarding my threat, "so this accounts for your ill-temper, I suppose. But tell me, does she care for you?"

"How do I know, blockhead! I can't get to know her."

"What! not know a girl when you live opposite to her. Why, what I should do is—"

"Yes, yes, but we're not all cads like you, Hardy. I could no more go up to that girl and speak to her than I could fly," I said.

"Dear me, how strange. I could."

"Let me catch you, and you will never know your own face again, that's all!"

"Don't worry, dear boy, my hands are quite full with the Miss Jarvises. Two of 'em, that's the worst of it."

"Yes, there isn't much of you to divide, is there, Hardy?"

"But tell me more about this girl of yours—is she really pretty? Should *I* consider her decent?"

I glared wrathfully at him.

"I shall not call upon your opinion, you may be sure of that. I only told you about the affair because I thought you might help me."

"Oh, yes, I can help you — been through a lot of these things myself, nothing easier. Want her name first, eh?"

"Yes, I suppose that would help."

"Of course. Give the postman a shilling—he'll tell you."

"D'you think he would?"

"Certain. Wait, here he comes. I'll manage this for you. Uncommon smart in these sort of things, you see!"

Hardy sprang from the room, and really I couldn't help thinking that he was rather decent on the whole. I heard an altercation at the door and then he returned. He looked a bit crestfallen.

"No good, old chap—she's married."

"She's what?" I cried horrorstruck.

"She's married—must be—postman knows me, he said no lady lives there other than Mrs. Brown, he never takes a letter for one."

"Well—perhaps she doesn't get any letters."

"What, a pretty girl, and no letters—not likely."

"Well?"

"Well, but the last month a lot of letters—most of them large business packets—have been delivered to John Humphreys, Esq., and never before."

I sank back with a groan.

"She can't possibly be married," I said, "she's only a girl. Besides, I've never seen a man come out of the house."

"That's nothing, my boy, she's married an old man, depend on it, and he's an invalid, no doubt!"

"Hardy, there are moments when to kill you would give me exquisite pleasure—leave the house and go to your infernal bank, while I have control over this hammer!" I cried, and

Hardy fled, but more in haste to catch his train than fear of my threat I am thinking. For the rest of that day I wandered about disconsolate. Married! Married! was all I kept repeating to myself. Vague dreams of suicide floated through my mind, and I worked myself into such a pitch of morbid excitement that I felt more heroic than ever did the hero of a yellow-backed novel.

I saw her out gardening as usual. I felt it a sin to look at her. Mrs. John Humphreys, indeed! Fool that I was to waste the best love of my heart on—

The mustard-brown tweed mixture inclosing Hardy, cut short my ruminations. His round goggling brown eyes goggled more than ever. His silly mouth was open, showing his irregular and bad teeth. He had an air of "abandon" about him that struck me as brutal when one considered my perturbed state.

"My boy!" he cried, with a resounding whack on my back that I resented, "my boy, it's all right!"

"What is?"

"She is!"

"What are you drivelling about, now? Talk sense if you can, or else go to the asylum!"

"I mean she's all right for you."

"I fail to grasp your meaning in the least," I replied with enforced calmness (was ever such a fool as this man?).

"She's not married!" he blurted out.

I felt instantly as if the sun had come out. Drawing Hardy's arm through mine I retired into the house. I for one was walking on air.

"How do you know?"

"By this!" and he flapped the limp sheets of a current magazine in my face.

"Look here—I was having lunch to-day, and looking through this when I came to an article—or a tale, no, I think it's a bit of poetry, and there was the signature under it 'John Humphreys.' So—now wait a minute, my lad—I looked up, and sitting near me was Joggins, the editor of the *Weekly Graspall News*—a nice chap Joggins, owes me a quid—so I said, did he know the man Humphreys, and this is what he said—of course it was a so-called trade secret, but still I, being *I*, you see——"

"Go on, Hardy, spare us yourself."

"Well, I mean he told me in confidence, that John Humphreys was a woman, a Miss Cynthia Phillips, and she was staying just now at Surbiton. In fact, he said he had had a letter from her this very morning, and her address was Elm Cottage!"

I wrung Hardy silently by the hand and passed him my cigar case. Neither did I in the least mind when he took one to smoke and placed the case in his own pocket.

"That point settled, we can now continue," he said.

"Ye-es," I replied dubiously. "But I am no nearer knowing her than I was before."

"My dear boy, let me advise you. Had a lot of experience, 'sure you. Always successful with ladies. I should write to her."

"How can I? She is not on the stage."

"No, but she is a writer. Write and say how you have admired her bit of poetry, and ask her to meet you."

"I couldn't, she'd never answer me."

"Wouldn't she—you try it!"

I remained obdurate, but at length Hardy's advice prevailed, and between us we concocted a letter which I sent, accompanied by some violets which I went to Richmond to buy.

The letter and box were delivered next morning and taken up to her room. From the safe screen of the window curtain I watched her open and read the humbly flattering note, and untie the box. She smiled when she saw the contents, and lifted them up to smell the sweetness. I felt a frantic longing to become a violet on the spot.

With a perfectly grave face she looked across at our house, and sat down to her writing-table.

I wondered was she replying?

Sure enough next morning a note was delivered to me containing the words, "Many thanks, it is very good of you,—JOHN HUMPHREYS."

Hardy, all excitement, came to my room to read the letter (a thing he had never done before), and drew aside the blinds and stood by the window talking to me quite a while. I began to think he was rather a decent sort of chap after all.

"It isn't very encouraging, is it?" I said from the bed, after I had read the formal little note twice through.

"You see she's a reserved sort of girl—no gush. I know 'em, met a lot in my time. Turn out the best in the end. To a chap like me——"

"Yes, well, that's enough."

"You're awfully impatient, Clifford. You ought to listen."

"Tell me how I can write to her again."

"Nothing easier. Write and ask her for her autograph."

"Here it is on her note."

"Oh, yes, I forgot that. Well, I should make no bones about it. Write and say how much you care for her, and how you have longed to meet her, and how your friend Hardy has——"

"That's enough, I think you are getting more than I can bear now, so you'd better go."

But all that day I turned possible letters over in my mind, until I felt I must adopt Hardy's plan (in a modified form), or die.

So I wrote very guardedly, and told her how I had watched her brilliant career, and felt what an honour it would be if I might be allowed to call her one of my friends. She replied in the third person that I could do as I liked.

These, with all the force I could summon, I flung down on Hardy.

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Next time I sent some flowers and a box of chocolates. The latter were returned without a word and Hardy ate them.

By this time I felt myself becoming emaciated and I lost interest even in my personal appearance.

Hardy, however, seemed to expand and fatten on my misery and depression. Every morning when he left the house he wore either some new tie or a buttonhole, and he swaggered down the street swinging his cane with his idiotic head in the air as if all Surbiton belonged to him. "She" used to be in the garden very often, and I have seen her smile at his retreating figure. No wonder, what with refusing my advances and looking at Hardy's antics, she must have had a poor opinion of the inmates of our house.

Then Hardy deserted me.

"I shouldn't worry, old chap," he said soothingly. "She's not having any. Come round and play ping pong at McCormack's. Got an awfully jolly niece staying there, introduce you, can't take her on myself."

"Any more of your vulgar and offensive remarks," I said loftily, "and you won't be fit to be seen in the Bank."

"Well, anyone can see with half an eye she doesn't intend to speak to you. Either your appearance or your manners have set her off, it's *quite* evident."

A loaf of bread was beside me, and the temptation was too strong. In another second it was flying through the air, and Hardy's aggressively, shiny top hat was flying in front of it.

Some men would have remonstrated. Not Hardy. He rebrushed his ruffled head-gear and bestowing on me one withering look, departed silent.

"Miss Phillips," I gasped, "forgive me."

Next morning I was astounded to receive a note which said:

"Dear Sir,—I would be obliged if in future you do not try and make my acquaintance. I shall not see you if you call again, neither will bribing my servant gain you admission, I don't know who you are, or what you want. Perhaps you are a reporter. I have the greatest dislike to being interviewed. At any rate I consider your conduct of last night far from gentlemanly.—

"John Humphreys."

Whatever could it mean? I had done nothing. The note clearly implied that I had called upon her and bribed the servant to let me see her. What a horrible mistake!

I sat down at once, and informed John Humhpreys that I had not the slightest idea to what she referred. There was no answer to this, and I wondered more and more what it could mean. Hardy could throw no light on the matter either. At first he thought it a ruse to encourage me to call but that was disproved by her remark that if I came again she would not see me.

No, it was a mystery.

"I'll tell you what I'd do, Clifford. I'd write straight out, tell her your feelings and ask her to meet you. Say you will come across the road at eleven tomorrow and if she is in the garden it is a sign that you are forgiven," he said, taking a long breath.

It was a bold try, but I felt a desperate man. Some climax had to be arrived at somehow, and the sooner the worst was known the sooner the suspense would be over.

So nerving myself with a brandy and soda I sat down and wrote to her.

Next day, Hardy, more carefully dressed than ever, went later to the Bank than I had ever known him. It must have been past ten before he wished me luck and left the house.

After he had gone I felt a terrible sickening come over me. My only friend had now left me, and I had the ordeal to go through alone!

I shaved, and having struggled into a collar that would *not* button. I finally found myself ready, and the clock pointing to the quarter.

Surely if she was coming out at all she would be there by now?

The trees in our garden and those in hers made it difficult to observe a person standing in some places. However, as I reached the window I saw her door open, and she, clad in a light dress, came forth with a watering pot in her hand.

My heart bounded and then stood still, for her face, as a rule so soft and gentle, was set with a look of determined displeasure.

She stood for a moment looking towards our house. Her face became colder, her eyes more indignant. What could it be? I shrank back, although I felt certain she could not see me, she hardly seemed looking at me either, her glance fixed

itself below my window, and her lovely face had now become transfixed with a look of utter disguest.

It was our porch, our doorstep, that was her centre of attraction!

Seizing my shaving glass I held it in such a way that a view of the doorstep was seen.

At the same instant every drop of blood in my body seemed to rush to my head, for there was Hardy in an absurd attitude, in the act of kissing his hand to her!

Everything went red before my infuriated gaze. The next moment I realised that I had opened my window and was leaning out, my two hands full of metal blow-pipes, files, hammers, and pieces of iron that I had snatched from my table. These, with all the force I could summon, I flung down on Hardy, following it up with the contents of the water-jug.

There was a shout from his direction, and a burst of laughter from the other side of the road.

Tearing downstairs five steps at a time, I flung the hall door open and kicked my prostrate friend heartily, then ran, hatless as I was, down the garden, across the road.

"Miss Phillips," I gasped, "forgive me. I can understand now your refusal. That little cad has been annoying you in my name. It has only just dawned on me."

She blushed the loveliest colour and wiped the tears of laughter from her eyes.

"I had no idea you were—you. I thought that other one was Mr. Clifford, and you were Mr. Hardy," she said.

I groaned.

"Who told you that?"

"No one, but one always raised his hat as he went by in the morning, and—you never even looked in as you passed, that I thought it must be he. Of course if I had known, perhaps—" and she stopped and blushed again.

"Perhaps you would have let me come and see you," I finished eagerly, and she did not deny it.

"I feel now," I said, "as if I could go back and burn him."

"Come in the house before you damage him any more. Poor man, I think he is punished enough. I wonder you did not kill him with all those things you threw at him just now."

But Hardy didn't die, although I had cut his head open with a chisel. It would take more than that to kill Hardy.

Die, indeed! I should think not. He asked to be best man the other day, and said if it hadn't been for him I should never have had Miss Phillips!

There comes across me an idea sometimes that Hardy is even past being put in a lunatic asylum. **Erroll Stanhope.**

FOR HER MOTHER'S SAKE.

"I AM the nurse," said a quiet voice, as the sick man opened his inquiring eyes, conscious for the first time in three weeks.

At the sound of it the shadow of a smile drifted across the rugged face on the pillow; it carried him back fifty years to the little brook singing under the murmuring pines on the old farm—and Dorothy Allen.

"You have been very ill," continued the voice. "Now that you are better you must not talk, but drink this and go to sleep." The eyes closed obediently, but the indomitable will that had changed its owner—a country lad in an obscure little village—into "Old Tom Burns," millionaire master of the great Burns steel works, strove with reawakened vigour to remember.

Presently it all came back to him. His nephew Tom had married in spite of his uncle's emphatic prohibition that woman who had nursed him in the London hospital—"a clever schemer, hoping to come into the wealth to which Tom was heir." In a rage he had refused to listen to any explanation, but had told the boy to go and starve with his adventuress, not one penny of his money should either of them ever have. He had meant that his dead brother's son should take his place as head of the company, but now——

Gradually the tired brain drifted into slumber, and "Old Tom" stood again by the side of the little brook—swollen now to an angry river—watching two figures, Tom and the woman he had married, struggling in the swift current, and lo! just as they were sinking from his sight, the woman turned her head towards him and with a cry of horror and remorse he saw the face of his unforgotten sweetheart of the long ago—Dorothy Allen.

Day by day, as his strength returned, old Tom watched the svelte figure in the blue gown moving softly about the room, her deft fingers skilfully anticipating his slightest want, her voice reminding him unceasingly of Dorothy.

"My dear," he said one day, laying his wrinkled palm across the slender hand arranging the pillow, "you remind me very much of someone I used to know. Will you tell me your name?"

"Mine?" said the nurse, suddenly flushing. "Oh, it—it is Mrs. Thomas. Who is it that I am like?"

"Someone I loved long ago," said the old man softly, "but she loved someone else. I left the little town when she married," he continued musingly, "but I have never forgotten and I see her again when I hear your voice. Who was it that brought you here to nurse me?"

"Someone who loves you asked me to come, and I wished to also because I——" she stopped abruptly.

Old Tom suddenly sat up. "No one loves me," he said hoarsely, a curious pang of self-pity for the first time in his hard, driving life tearing at his heart-strings; "I used to think Tom, my nephew, did, but he has thrown me over for a bad woman I do not know. Of whom are you speaking?"

"Are you sure she is so very bad—this woman?" said the girl with averted face. "How can you tell if you have never seen her? Perhaps, after all, she loves your nephew?"

"No, no," said the old man, laying his head softly on the pillow; "it was the money she was after, not Tom. You are a kind-hearted little girl, but you do not understand such women; they are not like you, or—Dorothy Allen."

The nurse's face grew suddenly white. "What are you saying, Mr. Burns?" she gasped. "My mother's name was Dorothy Allen before she married and my name is Dorothy too."

Old Tom suddenly caught her hands. "Yes, yes," he cried eagerly, "I see. I told you you reminded me of her. Dorothy's daughter. Tell me," with growing excitement, "who sent you to me?"

"Tom sent me; I am his wife. Oh," desperately, "I didn't mean to tell you yet, but after you got well and perhaps had learnt to like me a little. Indeed, I am not what you think. I never knew Tom was going to have any money until after I had promised to marry him, and I loved him so I couldn't give him up, even to please his uncle. Believe me, please believe me, for my mother's sake."

Slowly the arms drew her down until her face rested on the pillow beside the other, seamed and old. "Dorothy's daughter, Tom's wife," said old Tom softly. "Why didn't the young rascal have sense enough to tell me his wife's name. Is he here in the house?"

"He has been here every day since you have been ill," said the girl. "He feels very, very badly because you are angry with him."

"H'm," said the old man, with assumed sternness, though the clasp of his fingers tightened, "go and fetch him, and tell him—tell him that he did very wrong to marry without his old uncle's consent, but considering who the girl is that he has married I'll forgive him. I'd have married her mother if she would have had me, in spite of forty uncles. Don't be long—Dorothy," with a queer little choke, as the nurse, suddenly laying her soft lips on his wrinkled cheek, rose and sped swiftly from the room. **M. L. Adams.**

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OUR NEW SERIAL.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

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For New Readers.

SYNOPSIS.

A belt full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude. Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Reville is guilty, sets himself to prove the latter's guilt. Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!"

CHAPTER XIII.
Did She Speak Truly?

"That—that man is *my* husband!"

It was as if a bomb had suddenly crashed down into the room. Esther Seaton and Revelle both sprang to their feet. Then a moment of tense silence followed. There was no stir. The woman who had spoken the words seemed to have become petrified. Her hand was outstretched, her eyes riveted on Seaton Revelle's face—every vestige of colour had gone from it! The suddenness, the unexpectedness of it all, had temporarily numbed Esther's reasoning faculties.

It was only a matter of a second or so, but it seemed an eternity before the spell was broken. Revelle took a step forward, and fastened his eyes on the woman's bloodless face with a fixed stare, in which all the man's strength and iron will seemed concentrated. For a moment the woman's eyes met his, and braved their hard stare; then they wavered, and the spirit that was shining from them seemed to fade away, and give place to the old dull, lifeless look. She shivered, and took a backward step. Her eyes sought the ground as though the man's unblinking stare were too hard to be borne!

"My good woman," said Revelle, in a low, almost compassionate voice, "this is a huge mistake. You are taking me for someone else. Come, look at me again! Look well!"

The soft-toned light of the great shaded lamp fell upon the three figures grouped together in a dramatic tableau—upon Esther as, a graceful, beautiful figure in her simple but exquisite gown, she leant forward a little, questioning, startled wonder in her dilated eyes; upon the handsome, well-knit man in evening dress; upon the shrinking figure of the parlour maid Vance, from whose bloodless, down-bent face, a former prettiness seemed to have been washed out!

"Come, look at me again!"

With an effort the woman raised her eyes. They seemed drawn upwards in spite of herself.

Except for the pallor of his complexion and a slight, almost imperceptible, beading of perspiration on his forehead, Revelle looked quite calm and collected now. Esther's eyes wandered from one face to the other. What would Vance's answer be? Was it a case of mistaken identity? Or was some discreditable page of this man's past about to be revealed—this man from whom, for the sake of her convict lover, she cloaked her loathing under a mask of friendship, in whom she saw the cause of all her misery?

"I—yes, I must, must have made a mistake!" whispered Vance, in a low, mechanical voice. "I ask your pardon, sir. I ask your pardon!"

There was something about the low, monotonous tones that made the words sound as if they had been spoken to order.

Then Vance turned to Esther.

"Miss, will you please forgive me? I have made a mistake, but I—I've had so much trouble, so much trouble!"

With a quick movement she covered her face with her hands and started to sob piteously.

"Mr. Revelle," said Esther quickly, "I must ask you to excuse me!"

Gently taking the woman's arm, she led her from the room. As they passed from sight, Revelle drew his hand across his forehead. His expression became ghastly.

It was no case of mistaken identity. The woman whom Esther Mansfield had led from the room was his wife! He had crushed her spirit years ago; by sheer force of will he had compelled her to retract her words, deny herself; but now that she was beyond the spell of his personality, what if she should speak? She had it in her power to expose him, she could prove him to be something very different from what he seemed. If she spoke, it meant the toppling down of his carefully built plans. Even now she might be telling Esther Mansfield that the Seaton Revelle who posed as the gentleman of independent means, who was received in society, was——

John Mansfield, carrying a box of cigars, entered the room.

"Hullo," he said, "what's become of Esther?"

Then he caught sight of the broken cups on the floor.

"Why, what's happened?"

Revelle had himself under control again. The situation was desperate; but he meant to play the game of bluff to the end!

"Why, Revelle, what's the matter? You're looking upset. What's happened?"

"A most distressing business, Mr. Mansfield," he said deliberately. "I *am* upset!"

He gave an account of what had happened.

"The whole thing," he concluded, "was very startling, very piteous—the sort of thing that might have done me an incalculable amount of harm, if the poor woman had persisted in her belief, or I were not in a position to prove it absolutely impossible. You can imagine that I am feeling a little un-

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nerved. We men have a horror of this sort of thing. You know, Mr. Mansfield, that when it's a case of a woman's word against a man's, the woman is the one believed in nine cases out of ten, unless the man has outside proof to back him up. And Miss Mansfield was present. You can imagine my feelings. However, the poor creature—there is a sad tragedy somewhere in her past—acknowledged her mistake, but it was most awfully unpleasant whilst it lasted!"

He breathed out a deep sigh of relief. He was playing his part remarkably well. The banker had listened with astonishment.

"My dear Revelle," he said, with much concern, "I am most distressed—most! You're my guest, and for such a thing to have happened in my house—I'm sorry, exceedingly sorry. Of course, obviously a mistake; but I can quite realise your feelings. I wouldn't have had such a thing happen in my house for worlds, if it could have been prevented. Please accept my apologies!"

And the banker, in his anxiety to impress upon him his complete belief that it was a mistake, held out his hand.

Revelle shook it warmly, with the air of a man who appreciated.

"Thank you very much indeed! You see"—his voice faltered a little—"I was just beginning to feel that Miss Mansfield had forgiven me my share in that wretched Scarsdale affair, and I shall feel it frightfully if this business again puts me in a false light!"

"My dear Revelle, you may be quite sure that Esther will see this matter in its true light. It is so obviously a mistake."

The banker rang the bell, and told the servant who entered to clear away the *debris*, and bring fresh coffee; then, with the object of putting his guest at his ease, he turned the conversation into another channel.

"I've only just heard, Revelle, that you're an aeronaut. I'd no idea that you went in for that sort of thing till Normanhurst—I was dining at the Towers last night—told me that you were a second Santos Dumont!"

Lord Normanhurst was one of the magnates of the county. Shortly after Revelle's installation at The Firs he had called upon him—an act that was looked upon as guaranteeing the social status of the newcomer.

Revelle laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"A shocking exaggeration," he said, "I've always been awfully keen on the subject, and can handle your ordinary balloon all right, but that's not being a Santos Dumont." He accepted one of the banker's cigars. "Normanhurst was telling me the other day that he is getting up an affair in his grounds in aid of the Church Restoration Fund, and asked me if I could help in any way. 'Pon my word, I was half joking when I suggested a balloon ascent; but he jumped at the idea, and I suppose that I've been and let myself in for it. It's been a hobby of mine for years!"

"I should say that it requires a lot of nerve!"

"I don't know about that. Some fellows take to the air as naturally as others take to water."

Revelle lighted his cigar, and smothered under a smile. He was thinking of an old, faded picture-poster that he had preserved as a memento, but showed to nobody—a picture representing a man in tights and spangles, holding on to a parachute with one hand, and in the other a lighted cigar, in the act of making a descent through mid-air. Beneath the picture, in a foreign language, the announcement that on a certain date the famous Signor Balderini would make a parachute descent.

But the tendency to smile was only momentary. Revelle glanced towards the door, and a shadow played across his features. Esther had been gone some time now. What was passing between her and—"Vance"? A preoccupied look filled his dark eyes, and John Mansfield had to repeat the remark before he received an answer. Revelle had not experienced such a strain since that day at the Old Bailey when Scarsdale had turned in the dock and pointed up to the gallery. It was a scurvy trick for Fate to play upon him—to bring back that woman into his life at such a time. By sheer strength of will, he had gained his first desperate victory, but what was happening now, what of the future?

"No," he said, with a little start, as he suddenly realised that the banker was addressing a remark to him, "the date of Normanhurst's affair has not yet been definitely settled!"

When Esther quitted the drawing-room she had led Vance to the housekeeper's room. The woman had gone with her mechanically.

"I'm so sorry, miss," she whispered, her spiritless eyes bent upon the ground, "I was wrong! Would you please ask the gentleman to forgive me! It was a dreadful thing to have done; but for a moment he seemed so like, and—and I have had so much trouble, miss!"

She was speaking like a woman under the influence of a spell. Esther pitied her from the bottom of her heart; yet there was something about her manner that was unconvincing. She might have been repeating a lesson. And the thought flashed through Esther's mind that perhaps she was not speaking the truth now, that for some reason she had repented, and was trying to screen the man!

"Won't you tell me," she said compassionately, "what your trouble has been?"

"You're very kind, miss, but no good would come of doing that! It would only be opening an old wound, miss. But if you would tell the gentleman how sorry I am, and ask him to pardon me, and if you would pardon me yourself, miss, I should be very grateful. And perhaps you would excuse me for the rest of the evening!"

"Yes, certainly!" said Esther gently.

The woman curtesyed, and, without raising her eyes, glided out of the room. Esther did not return to the drawing-room at once. All her heart and soul were concentrated upon the task of unmasking the man who had brought shame and ruin to the man she loved. Had the woman spoken the truth? Now she told herself yes, now no! She must try to find out for certain. She knew that the kindly little man who was working for her and with her was most anxious to find out as much as possible about Revelle's past life. She would have something to tell "Mr. Penworthy" when she saw him in the morning. As she returned to the drawing-room she made up her mind that, whatever her doubts might be, she would let Revelle think that she believed Vance to have made a mistake. On the threshold she gave a little shiver. Heaven only knew what it was costing her to play her part!

Vance had crept away to her bedroom at the top of the house. Sinking on to the bed, she covered her face with her hands, and, rocking to and fro, moaned softly to herself.

"Jim, Jim!" she murmured faintly. "Yes, you, Jim Balder! Why did you ever come into my life? And your look, the old look! If I'd spoken, you—you'd have killed me! Your eyes told me that!"

And she went on rocking to and fro, and moaning.

Revelle's dark eyes sought Esther's face as she entered the room. Its expression was grave, but her eyes, meeting his, reassured him.

"Mr. Revelle," she said, "I am so sorry for what has happened. Poor Vance is terribly distressed about her mistake. She has asked me to apologise to you again!"

"Miss Mansfield, please say no more about the matter. It was a mistake. It might have placed me in a very embarrassing position if the poor woman had not realised her mistake; but—well, you realise it was a mistake, and so—er—I don't mind!"

He moved across to the grand piano,

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and started to look through a pile of songs that lay upon it.

"I wish you'd sing, Miss Mansfield. Ah, here's one of my favourite songs—'When all the World is Young, Lad!' I wish you'd sing it. It would be awfully sweet of you!"

"Yes, Esther," said the banker; "do, there's a good girl!"

Esther quietly sat down at the piano. Revelle placed the music on the stand, then, resting his elbow on the instrument, stood beside.

Her sweet, telling voice gave an exquisite rendering of the pathetic words and melody. But when she came to the last four lines, the notes before her seemed to blurr:

> Creep home, and take your place there,
> The spent and maimed among;
> God grant you find one face there
> You loved when all was young!

Chokingly she finished the song. The words had galvanised into life, cruel memories, had conjured up a vision of the distant future. Her mind winged itself away to a prison cell. When the weary years had passed, would the man she loved creep home, maimed and spent? Would he find there one face he loved?

The last notes of the song quivered away into a sob. With a gasp and a little shiver she rose from the piano. Her face was the colour of death.

Revelle bit his lips. Her emotion was obvious. It had been a mistake to suggest that song. John Mansfield was looking at his daughter anxiously. She had seemed so much brighter lately; he had fancied that the wretched past was fading from her memory. Esther sought a shadowed corner of the room. An awkward, strained silence followed, broken at last by a "Thanks awfully! A sad, but beautiful song!" from Revelle. A few moments later Esther rose, and wished him good-night. Her father took her in his arms.

"Good-night, my dear child!" he said unsteadily, as he kissed her. "God bless you!"

When she reached her room, she sank down on her knees, and prayed—and wept bitterly.

Half-an-hour later, a servant announced Mr. Revelle's brougham. As Benny had remarked: "There was any amount of style about the Marquis. No half-measures; he went the whole hog!"

Once within the brougham Revelle let drop the mask that he had been wearing. He drove his fingers into the palms of his hands. His face became set and cruel. Only a short while ago he had asked himself the question—what had become of her? And now she had come back into his life, and so long as she remained in it, must be a constant threat and danger. His hands opened and shut! She was not only in the way, but horribly dangerous! She had answered to his will that night; but—he tugged savagely at his moustache.

And if anything were to happen to her after that night, the episode might be remembered, and brought up against him. He wanted her out of the way; but the question was, how to do it?

When Revelle alighted at The Firs, the question was still unanswered. As a rule he was a sound sleeper; but he lay awake most of that night, haunted by a woman's bloodless, washed-out face. It had been pretty once—pretty enough years back to fascinate Jim Balder.

The wakeful man moved restlessly in his bed.

"If only," he muttered, "she were safely under ground!"

CHAPTER XIV.

In which Crump and P.C. Jackson Hold Quiet Converse.

"Well I never! Sometimes this world seems a very small place indeed, and at other times hopelessly, depressingly vast. Fancy meeting my old acquaintance, Tomlinson, again! And so, under the name of Railton, he has gone back to his old occupation of gentleman's gentleman—is acting in that capacity to Seaton Revelle. The Firs is indeed housing a pretty trio of rascals at the present time! Seaton Revelle, that's the hardest nut to crack. I can trace him back ten years—then there's a blank. It's not a good history, not exactly a bad history—what I should call a shaky history. No one seems to know anything definite about his financial resources. H'm, if I could only get a clue to how those stolen diamonds were disposed of! Everything, I think, will ultimately depend on that. The numbers of the banknotes, unfortunately, were not taken."

It was evening, the same evening that Seaton Revelle dined at Mr. Mansfield's, and Crump, a briar pipe between his lips, was leaning over some rustic railings, deep in reflection. A homely cottage formed a background. He had engaged a couple of rooms at Woodbine cottage in the name of Penworthy, explaining that he was engaged to alter and improve Mr. Mansfield's garden, a work of some magnitude. The cottage stood not far from the reservoir, and was some distance from the village. Crump avoided the village as much as possible. Mrs. Cobb, his landlady, was charmed with her lodger. Crump invariably won the hearts of old ladies.

Could one have obtained a glance at certain rough notes of his, one would have realised what a tremendous amount of work he had done since Scarsdale's conviction and sentence at the Old Bailey—work of the drudging, uninteresting order, disheartening work! For, parallel with the laborious task of ferreting out Revelle's past life and vainly endeavouring to get on the track of Benjamin Beard, he had been trying to solve the mystery of what had become of the stolen notes and diamonds. If Scarsdale's innocence were to be proved, someone else's guilt must be proved up to the hilt. And during those weary months when Esther was abroad, Crump had been ferreting among diamond dealers, brokers, pawnbrokers, certain notorious receivers of stolen stuff, not only in England but on the Continent.

And now, as the little man leant over the rustic railings, he told himself that, so far as the stolen stuff was concerned, he was no "forrarder" than when he started; but he was possessed of an indomitable patience, and refused to allow himself to be disheartened.

"But," he said to himself, "in other respects I am a leetle forrarder. The birds have come to roost. I shall have opportunities, hitherto unavailable, of personal observation, and—of course this is a conclusion on my part—I can't help thinking that this gathering together under the same roof of the Tinker, my old acquaintance Tomlinson, and Revelle—I do so want to find out more about *him*—forebodes a development of some kind. I shouldn't be surprised if it took the shape——"

The little man checked himself, and shook his head sorrowfully. He had only just been in time to prevent himself jumping at a tremendous conclusion.

Then his kindly face beamed all over as he felt a tug at his coat-tails. He turned round with a chuckle. A little girl of five years old, her head a mass of sunny curls—natural ones, not produced by the twirling of mother's fingers or the nightly insertion of curl-papers, reached up a fat, little hand to him.

"Grandmother sent me to bring you to supper!" she said.

"Then, sweetheart," said the little man, picking her up and placing her on his shoulder, "to supper you and I shall go!"

"But give us a ride round the garden first, please!" whispered the mite.

Crump did; and it was a question which of the two enjoyed the scamper most, the little girl or the veteran detective, hero of a hundred crimes. Nor was he content with that. When, puffing a little, he entered the cottage, he sought out Mrs.

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Cobb, and asked permission, as it was not really late, for Pollie to keep him company over his supper. He obtained permission.

And it was a pretty sight—the little, sunny-haired girl, seated on the arm of the chair, nestling close to the kindly-faced old man. When Mrs. Cobb entered to fetch Pollie away Crump's supper was untouched. Pollie's eyes were sparkling with delight.

"And who," Crump was saying, "do you think the beggar was?"

"The handsome Prince?" asked Pollie excitedly.

Mrs. Cobb's entrance had been unnoticed.

"Right!" cried Crump. "And who do you think the lonely girl, who minded the geese, was?"

"The beautiful Princess!"

"Right again!" chuckled Crump, as though the child had solved a most difficult problem. "And they were married and always loved one another, and lived ever so happily ever after. And now my story's ended, and—— Hullo, here's grandmamma come to fetch you to bed!"

It was only after Pollie, very much against her will, had been carried away that Crump suddenly remembered that he had entered the room with the intention of eating supper, not telling fairy tales.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, with a sigh. "It only seems yesterday that Freddie and Katie were sitting on my knees, and I was telling them that same story. And that reminds me, Freddie's on night-duty; but I shall have that fine young fellow, Tom Jackson, round here presently. Both of 'em fine lads, wholesome-minded, manly fellows. They are going to be a great help to me!"

Crump was an extraordinarily good judge of character. Freddie, otherwise P.C. Wilton Z 105, he had known almost from the day of his birth; Tom Jackson, his chum, the stalwart young constable on whose broad back Esther had written the note that had reached Scarsdale at Warham police-station, he had seen but little of, but quite enough to realise his sterling worth. Jackson might not be particularly brilliant, but he possessed courage, determination, and chivalry. He was not only devoted to Alec Scarsdale, the man who had saved him in the hour of his temptation, but he worshipped the very ground that Esther Mansfield trod upon. From the very first he had protested that Scarsdale was innocent. He had made up his mind to do all that lay in his power for him; but the ordinary constable has not much time to devote to private investigation. When, however, Revelle settled down at The Firs, Jackson told himself that greater opportunities were about to be afforded him, and he had made up his mind to keep his eyes very widely open, when Crump had appeared on the scene. When the veteran detective had taken both Fred Wilton and himself completely into his confidence, Tom Jackson's pride and delight may be more easily imagined than described.

Crump had just finished his supper when the young constable, in *mufti*, stepped into the low-roofed room. He had, it is almost needless to say, asked Mrs. Cobb if Mr. Penworthy—not Mr. Crump—were in.

"Sit down, my lad, light your pipe, and make yourself comfortable!"

Crump waved a hand to a chair.

"I'm afraid," said Jackson, "that I haven't much news for you, except that since Lord Normanhurst has called at The Firs most of the big swells round have followed suit, and there's a concert coming off in the schoolroom in aid of the Church Restoration Fund, and Mr. Faversham's down in the programme to sing comic songs!"

Crump's little eyes twinkled at this.

"Well I'm blessed!" he said, half-aloud, "what a delightful piece of impudence!"

"And," went on Tom, "there's some talk about a big affair in Lord Normanhurst's grounds—a sort of fête and gala. The date's not fixed yet; but Lord Normanhurst's secretary was round at the station this afternoon, making inquiries as to the number of men that could be spared for special duty in the grounds, and, this is what I'm coming to, Mr. Crump, he let drop something about a balloon ascent being made by Mr. Seaton Revelle!"

"Oh, indeed!" said Crump, "a balloon ascent. Dear me! You surprise me, Tom! Revelle an aeronaut? H'm, h'm! Now, I wonder where he acquired 'his experience'?"

The wrinkles round his little eyes puckered up. Then he shook a finger at Jackson.

"Tom, my lad, don't get into the way of using the name Crump, even in private—it might slip out in public. Penworthy, if you please. As it is, you know, I am not altogether comfortable. It's nearly a year ago, but that young rascal Freddie, gave me away in the bar of the Crown and Cushion. It would be a very serious thing if my real identity were to come out. It would put certain gentlemen on their guard. I am on rather thin ice, my dear lad. And I have to bear in mind that my old acquaintance, Tomlinson, is in the neighbourhood—a very sly fellow, a shocking coward, but sharp, and quick-sighted!"

He paused for a moment.

"You see, Tom, if we chose we could at this present moment make it very uncomfortable indeed for that little lot at The Firs. A notification to Lord Normanhurst, for instance, that Mr. Revelle's friend, who is about to sing comic songs in aid of the Church Restoration Fund, is a gentleman who has undergone five years' penal servitude, and was formerly known among the criminal fraternity as the Tinker, and that Mr. Revelle's valet is also an ex-convict—well, I fancy that it would result in a general clearance from The Firs! But that is not our game, Tom. We want to get proof of Alec Scarsdale's innocence!"

"Aye, that's it!"

"Therefore, instead of exposing these rascals at The Firs, our best policy is to connive at their continuance there, and devoutly hope that, for the present, at least, exposure will come from no extraneous quarter. If only they are given rope enough, I am hoping that, sooner or later, they will hang themselves. I can't help thinking that before long——"

The little man stopped abruptly.

"What?" questioned Jackson eagerly.

"No, Tom, no!" Crump shook his head sorrowfully. "It is dangerous to jump at conclusions. It has been the cause of many failures on my part. Take an old fellow's advice: if you wish to succeed in your calling, don't, don't jump at conclusions!"

And from the heavy sigh that the little man heaved, one might have fancied that he himself had failed ignominiously.

The stalwart young constable fidgeted a little on his chair.

"Well, Tom, what is it you want to say?"

"You'll be seeing Miss Mansfield to-morrow?" he stammered, the colour deepening on his honest face.

"Yes. I shall be at work on that front garden first thing in the morning," chuckled Crump, "and though I say it that shouldn't, I am making a very tidy job of it!"

Jackson drew a letter from his pocket.

"I don't know whether I've done wrong," he said, still with a tendency to stammer, "but, well, I took the liberty of writing to Mr. Scarsdale—knowing that the prison authorities would overhaul the letter first, I couldn't say anything confidential—but I just told him that me and others were always thinking of him, and I've got

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this letter back from him to-night. It's formal and guarded for the same reason as mine was, but it's cheerful—and, well, I was thinking that perhaps"—the colour deepened on his face, the stammer became more accentuated—"perhaps it would cheer up Miss—Miss Esther to see it. And when you see her, perhaps you'd give it to her, and you might say that Tom Jackson doesn't want it back!"

He handed Crump a blue, government-stamped envelope. Crump took it, rose up, and shook Jackson's hand warmly.

"Good lad!" he said with considerable emotion, "good lad!"

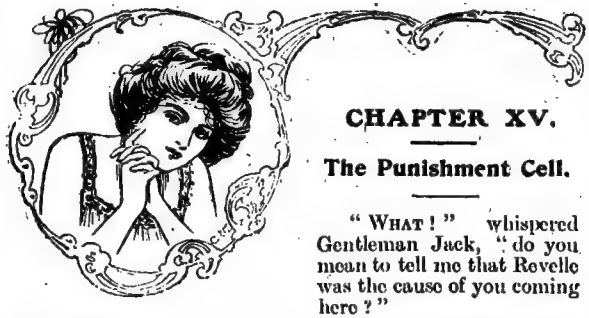
In his days of active service, Crump had been famous for his unorthodox behaviour; in his retirement he had retained his reputation by forming a close friendship with a certain one-time notorious malefactor, one Cully Scott, alias the Smasher; now he was about to act as an intermediary between a convict sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude and the girl he loved! He was indeed hopelessly unorthodox!

After some further conversation, Jackson prepared to leave.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that I haven't been much of a help so far; but I'm going to keep my eyes open!"

Crump patted him on the back.

"My dear lad, Rome wasn't built in a day! And, by the way, see if you can get on speaking terms with Railton. Give my love to Freddie, and tell him he might also try to make Railton's acquaintance!"



CHAPTER XV.

The Punishment Cell.

"What!" whispered Gentleman Jack, "do you mean to tell me that Revelle was the cause of you coming here?"

Alec Scarsdale sent his pick into the quarry-bed with a splintering crash.

"Yes!"

A warder sauntered up. The two convicts plied their picks in silence. Then, when the man had passed away again, Scarsdale—he had learnt the trick of speaking without moving his lips—told his story to the convict beside him.

"The scoundrel!" whispered Gentleman Jack. "It's clear enough to me. I know Revelle to my cost. My God! if I could only get my fingers round his throat!"

Scarsdale's pick again crashed into the bed.

"Crofton," he said, in a low, strained voice, addressing him by his proper name, "I want you to tell me all you know about—about Revelle!"

But it was not possible that afternoon. At that moment the distant, deep-toned prison bell clanged out the recall.

"Pile up tools—jackets on—fall in—file up!"

Scarsdale had plenty of food for reflection when, after having placed the tin pint, the wooden platter, the broom, and the zinc mug for water outside his door, he was alone in his cell. While awaiting his supper, he did not feel inclined to read the books that were allowed him, but sat on his three-legged stool, wrapped in thought. After supper had been brought round and he had finished his pint of cocoa and eight ounce loaf, he remembered that it was Tuesday, the day on which the weekly search was made. He was busily engaged in polishing his tins, when the door was flung open. Pettigrew and another warder stood inside.

"Now, then," cried Pettigrew, "look sharp, will you. I don't want to be kept here all night. Unroll your bedding!"

The man was a bully. He loved to hector it over his charges. He was also anxious for promotion. And he had planned something that he fancied would call the Governor's attention to what a zealous, careful officer he was!

Without speaking, Scarsdale obeyed. As he unrolled the sheets and blankets, something fell from them with a metallic crash on to the slate flooring. It was a steel wedge, about a foot in length, and similar to those used in the quarries. With a little cry of astonishment Scarsdale started back. How had it come to be concealed there?

With a malignant gleam of triumph in his eyes, Pettigrew, who had been piling up the various articles of the cell in a confused heap, darted forward and picked up the wedge. The other warder still stood outside.

"You rascal," cried Pettigrew, brandishing the instrument in his face, "where did you get this from? Sneaked it from the quarries, I suppose. And what for? To work your way out of the cell, or smash my head in. I'll run you in for this. I'll make it hot for you!"

For a moment Scarsdale was too staggered to make reply. The presence of the wedge among the bedding was absolutely incomprehensible to him. No man, however much he might contemplate escape, would attempt it from his cell. His only chance was in the open. Then, like a flash of light, a strange thought coursed through his brain. Had that wedge been purposely concealed there with the object of getting him into trouble? His heart throbbed with mad indignation at the thought. Only one man would have done it. His hands closed involuntarily as he took a step towards Pettigrew.

"I know nothing about it," he said, under his breath; "it was not there this morning. It must have been put there while I was at work in the quarry."

"Put there! What d'ye mean?" roared Pettigrew. "Who'd want to put it there? Don't give me any of your lies. You'll go before the Governor to-morrow morning for this."

Scarsdale knew what that meant—the punishment cell, loss of marks, and bread-and-water diet. He dug his nails deep into the palms of his hands in a fierce endeavour to control himself. But a dangerous look shone from his flashing grey eyes. So far he had borne the man's tyranny without a murmur; he breathed a brief prayer that he might not forget himself now. There was a time when, had any man spoken to him as Pettigrew spoke to him, he would have knocked him down; but he was a free man then, not a felon undergoing sixteen years' penal servitude, when good conduct meant remission of time!

"Here, don't stand staring at me like that; perhaps you've got something else stowed away about you. Strip, d'ye hear?"

Scarsdale did not stir, but a curious shiver passed over him.

"I tell you," he said, speaking as if he had not heard the last remark, "that I know nothing of that steel bar. It has been put there out of spite."

"Don't argue," cried Pettigrew, fiercely. "Are you going to strip, or am I going to make you?"

When a man is ordered to strip for searching purposes, it is no case of half measures, though sometimes a humane warder will allow the prisoner to retain some of his clothes, and content himself with "rubbing him down"—that is to say, passing his hands over his body.

Scarsdale's blood was boiling. The ignominy of being thus addressed burnt into his soul like a fiery brand. Again the hot desire to fling himself upon the brute who tyrannised over him surged into his brain. He had always been of an impetuous, fiery disposition. What it cost him to keep himself under was only known to himself. He bit his lips till the blood came; then mechanically removed his coat and waistcoat, and dropped them on the floor.

"Hurry up, will you! Off with the rest of 'em. There are no ladies about, confound you! You needn't be bashful!"

Perhaps the sneering look on the man's face was harder to bear than his words.

Scarsdale drew off his coarse flannel shirt. As he stood there stripped to the waist, he looked a picture of graceful strength and manhood, a striking contrast to the Herculean, bull-necked warder who was viciously eyeing him. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon him. The muscles of

arm and torso stood out firm and hard as iron. Every line suggested nervous strength.

Pettigrew was evidently not quite satisfied. The next moment he gave utterance to a coarse and horribly brutal jest. We will not sully these pages by repeating it. He had evidently studied the back files of some newspaper, and was conversant with all the details of Scarsdale's case.

The name of Esther Mansfield had passed his lips!

The slight flush that indignation had conjured up on Scarsdale's brow died suddenly away. He went livid. His body quivered as if a knife had been driven into his flesh.

It was too much. Anything but that! The man before him had profaned the name of the woman he loved, whose image was with him day and night, who represented to him all that was pure and good and beautiful—his ideal! Insult, tyranny to himself he might have borne, but not that!

With a wild, hoarse cry Scarsdale hurled himself upon the warder. But the burly giant was no mean antagonist.

Avoiding the terrible blow aimed at him, Pettigrew flung his arms around him with the grip of a bear, and by sheer weight bore him backwards against the half-open cell door. It closed to with a snap, shutting out the warder outside. The two men, convict and warder, were alone, locked in one another's arms. Then Scarsdale wrenched himself free. Pettigrew staggered back; then came again to meet an awful blow, that, catching him under the jaw, lifted him off his feet and sent him crashing to the floor, where he lay motionless as a dead man.

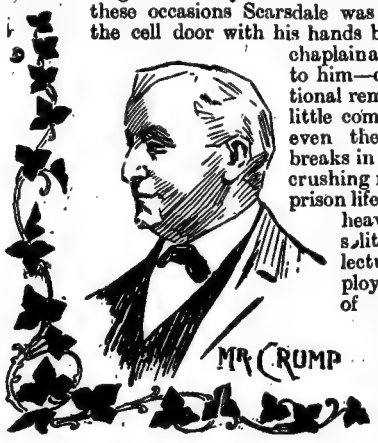
When the cell door was flung open, and warders rushed in, they found Scarsdale standing over the prostrate Pettigrew. His eyes were flashing wildly; his chest heaving with passionate emotion.

"He's got what he deserved," he hissed, between his clenched teeth; then he broke out into a ghastly laugh, "all right, I don't want to fight you, you can take me, do what you like with me. But he," he pointed to the prostrate figure, "got what he deserved!"

"What's all this about?" cried a principal warder, as he hurried into the cell. The matter was quickly explained. A few moments later Scarsdale was being led away under a strong escort of warders to the punishment cells—to be brought brought up before the Governor on the morrow.

When, on the following morning, Scarsdale was charged with assault and concealing an implement in his cell, the offence seemed so serious that the Governor postponed sentence till the arrival of the prison visiting director.

Scarsdale had five days to wait before his arrival—five days that were spent in solitary confinement in the punishment-cell. Books were denied him, and he was not allowed to take exercise; but he was kept hard at work picking oakum. For the first three days his diet was bread and water, but on the fourth day a pound of potatoes and a pint of gruel were added. Night and morning the cell was rigorously searched. Twice during the five days he was visited by the chaplain. On these occasions Scarsdale was ordered to stand at the cell door with his hands behind him, while the chaplain addressed a few remarks to him—commonplace, conventional remarks, that carried but little comfort with them; yet even they were welcome as breaks in the monotonous, soul-crushing routine. The ordinary prison life had pressed upon him heavily enough; but the solitude, the low, unintellectual labour he was employed upon, the absence of sufficient light, the want of exercise, the miserable diet, made the present existence a thousand times more unendurable. Even the privilege of attending chapel was denied him, and he longed for the sound of human voices. But his longing was in some measure gratified. As on the Sunday he paced restlessly up and down the square brick cell, the distant sound of many voices singing in unison, and the words, dimly distinct, of the old hymn he knew so well and associated with boyhood's days, reached his ears:



Oh, God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come.

He stood still to listen. The hard, defiant look that his face had lately worn softened, and the muscles about his mouth twitched. His heart was throbbing as if it would burst. The strong words seemed to bear a message of hope to him, to illumine the darkness of his soul.

When, a few minutes later, the warder on duty peered through the spy-hole in the door, Convict 35, his discoloured hands clasped together, his head bent forward, knelt in prayer on the stone floor.

"Oh, God! For freedom!"

CHAPTER XVI.

In the Nick of Time!

The windows of Esther's bedroom looked out upon the front garden. The first grey light of dawn found her wide-awake, and welcoming it. Thoughts had crowded unceasingly through her brain during the sleepless night. Human beings had peopled the darkness. Sometimes it had been Alec, haggard and wan, dressed as, once, at a railway station, she had seen a string of handcuffed men dressed; then it had been Vance, pale, spiritless, looking like a woman whose soul had been beaten out of her body; then it had been Revelle, handsome, pale, deliberate; then it had been a homely little man who had seemed to nod at her smilingly, and bid her be of good cheer.

But the dawn had broken at last. She rose from her bed, and peeped out of the window. All was grey and still. She shivered. The same grey light must be stealing over the cruel prison that held the man she loved. Nearly a year, and never a word from him! She knew why! Her father had been in communication with the prison authorities. He had done so, believing that he was doing what was right and best for his child's sake. He had stated that any communication from the convict Scarsdale to his daughter would only cause distress, and requested those in power to use their authority.

Oh, but it was all hard to bear!

The grey, dull light was beginning to warm with a pale saffron hue. Esther let fall the curtain, and donned her clothes. It was no uncommon thing now for her to be up and out at sunrise. No soul was stirring in the house as she passed out of her room.

She made her way down to a side-door.

On reaching it, she gave vent to a little exclamation of surprise!

It was neither locked nor bolted! The servants must have forgotten it the night before. She would mention the fact to Mrs. Tilley.

The cool morning breeze, beating upon her fevered forehead, seemed to bear with it a spirit of calm. It was not a far cry to the wood-girt reservoir, with its memories bittersweet. And, for all its sadness, she loved the spot where Alec Scarsdale had whispered of his love!

A glimpse of Woodbine cottage through the trees brought

Crump to mind. She would be seeing him later in the morning, and there would be much to tell him.

She was hungry for that moment to come. Would he think, as she had thought, that Vance had made no mistake?

Her eyes brightened as she neared the rustic railings in front of the cottage. She would not have so long to wait as she had fancied. She had caught a glimpse of a little man, hatless, his back turned towards her. He was bending over a rose-tree, evidently inhaling the perfume of the roses. He looked round at the sound of her footsteps.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Crump. "Miss Mansfield! Well, I never! But this is early for a morning walk. Ah, but perhaps you're like me—think the early morning the most beautiful part of the day!"

He stepped out into the road and shook her very heartily by the hand.

"If you're going for a walk may I have the privilege of accompanying you?"

Esther's hand tightened round his.

"Yes, please do! I've something which I think is very important to tell you!"

"Ah, indeed! If you'll excuse me one minute, I'll creep in and get my hat. I'm the only one up at present. I also have something to tell you—or, rather, I should say, give you. But I think I won't give it you till after our little walk!"

Crump referred to the letter that Tom Jackson had intrusted to him the evening before, and his innate sense of delicacy told him that it would be best to give it her at parting. She would like to be alone when she read it! And Esther, little dreaming what it was he had to give her, was content to wait.

"And so," said the little man, on his return from the cottage, wearing a hat, "you have something very important to tell me?"

"Yes! About something that happened last night!"

Crump pursed up his lips, ready to listen. They were moving along the road now towards the entrance to the bridle-path that led through to the reservoir. Then Esther told him what had happened after dinner in the drawing-room on the previous evening; of Vance; of those startling words: "That—that man is my husband!" Of what followed, and Vance's curious reticence on the matter.

Crump's little eyes beamed brightly, and the wrinkles round them seemed to become multiplied; but he listened without interrupting. Esther was still talking when they reached the bridle-path. Almost unconsciously she turned into it.

"What do you think?" she whispered in a low voice, strained with excitement. "Do you think that it was no mistake, that Vance was afraid, regretted what she had done, was perhaps cowed?"

Crump's expression told of a brown study.

"At present," he said, more to himself than to Esther, "I don't feel in a position to make a definite statement, one way or the other; but it is very remarkable! I should like very much to jump at a conclusion; but I will not allow myself—but I shall be very anxious to see this poor woman, Vance. A woman, you say, who looks as if her spirit had been completely broken?"

"Yes!"

"Ah! I shall be interested, very interested to——"

He stopped abruptly. Esther had suddenly clutched his arm, and was pointing ahead with her free hand! They had reached a turn in the path from which the margin of the reservoir was visible.

"Look!" she whispered. "What's that woman going to do?" (*To be continued.*)

Wife: "My dear, what is the subject of to-morrow's sermon?" Minister: "The Frivolities of Modern Dress." Wife: "You must postpone it. I want to wear my new gown to-morrow for the first time."

Your Editor Chats.

Before you arrive at this page, you will, of course, have noticed that at last I have been able to give you No. 1 of the "Confessions of Cynthia." And having read the first instalment you will easily understand how it was that we were obliged to hold the confessions back, till certain legal proceedings were over, for the exposure is as complete as it is astounding. And now I want to ask a small favour of my readers. After you have read your *Short Stories* you may, of course, like to keep the copy. On the other hand, you may not be particular about doing so. If you are not, please do not throw the copy away, but hand it on to some friend whom you know is not a reader. Such an arrangement is really pleasant all round, for your friend will be pleased with the paper, and you will be pleased that he is pleased, and we shall be pleased that you both are pleased. And after all it is not much trouble to you to hand your copy along, and it may do a lot of good.

I should like to say here that I shall always be glad to receive letters from my subscribers expressing views as to the matter published in *Short Stories*. And, needless to say, if any suggestions offered appeal to me as being suitable to adopt, I shall present a little gift to the reader who suggested it.

You will see that I have announced another competition this week. It is by no means a difficult one, and I am hoping for as good, if not a better response to this as to last week's announcement. I may also say that I have a big surprise in store for readers in the shape of a new scheme. As, however, arrangements for working it are not quite complete, I cannot do more at present than ask my readers to keep a look out for the first announcement.

Result of the River Competition.

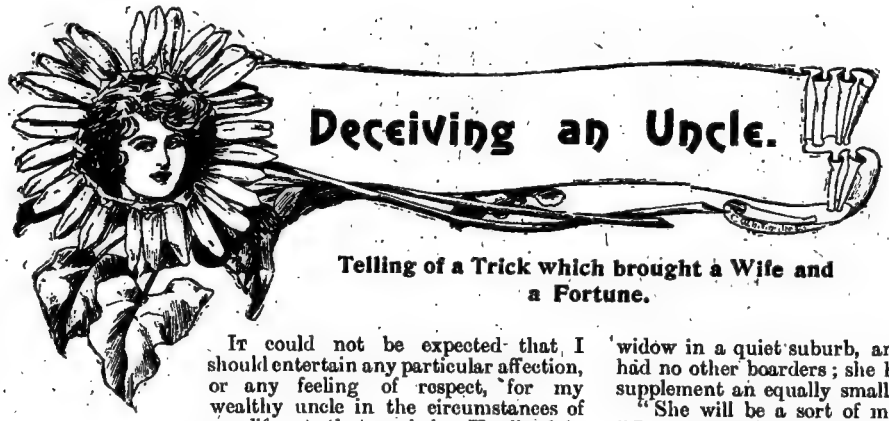
The first prise of £10 has been divided equally amongst the three competitors who sent correct lists of the rivers:

Miss Lucy White, 162 Camberwell New Road, S.E.
Miss Florence White, 162 Camberwell New Road, S.E.
A. Chester, 15 Granby Buildings, Vauxhall, S.E.

The second to sixth prizes have been added together and divided equally amongst those with only one mistake:

F. Chester, 15 Granby Buildings, Vauxhall, S.E.; W. Stevens, 3 Campbell Street, Greenock; J. Adam, 9 Parkhurst Road, Bowes Park, N.; Miss F. White, 162 Camberwell New Road, S.E.; Mrs. Barnes, 2 Vauxhall Walk, Lambeth; R. Barnes, 37 Princes Road, Kennington; H. Barnes, 2 Vauxhall Walk, Lambeth; S. White, 162 Camberwell New Road, S.E.; W. Chester, 15 Granby Buildings, Vauxhall, S.E.; Miss L. White, 162 Camberwell New Road.

Solution: 1, Aire or Ayr; 2, Tees; 3, Bann; 4, Cam; 5, Tweed; 6, Dart; 7, Wye; 8, Exe; 9, Eden; 10, Dove; 11, Barrow; 12, Forth; 13, Tyne; 14, Tamar; 15, Colne; 16, Camel; 17, Conway; 18, Don.; 19, Beame; 20, Test; 21, Foyle; 22, Thames; 23, Spokes Mill; 24, Washford; 25, Blackwater; 26, Teith; 27, Costar or Costa; 28, Lee or Lea; 29, Ewe; 30, Hull; 31, Wear; 32, Evenlode; 33, Awa; 34, Soar; 35, Bandon; 36, Whiteadder; 37, Earn or Erne; 38, Mole; 39, Trim; 40, Dee; 41, Lyon; 42, Oke or Oak; 43, Tame; 44, Bran; 45, Suck; 46, Tawe; 47, Wey; 48, Windrush; 49, Till; 50, Cart; 51, Brent or Brant; 52, Sow; 53, Bream; 54, Hayle; 55, Berry Water; 56, Bush; 57, Beel; 58, Idle; 59, Otter; 60, Almond.



Deceiving an Uncle.

Telling of a Trick which brought a Wife and a Fortune.

It could not be expected that I should entertain any particular affection, or any feeling of respect, for my wealthy uncle in the circumstances of my life at that period. He lived in Italy for the benefit of his health, and he had not been to England for twenty years; consequently, he had not seen me since I was a child, and he was quite unknown to me. Then, he had not worried himself about me when my father died; he was too ill to attend the funeral, and he took it for granted that I was well provided for, which is a very convenient method of shaking one's self free from relatives who might require assistance. He limited his solicitude on my behalf to one letter a year, sent for what he believed was my birthday, but which was three months out of date; he did not send a present, but restricted his affection to a few words of congratulation.

I was left with a small share in a large business, which was sufficient to maintain and educate me: it was understood that, on reaching the age of twenty-one, I should enter the firm and take up the position of junior partner, so I felt that I owed nothing to my uncle, and had nothing to expect from him.

It was just at that time that I received the usual annual epistle, but on that occasion I was astonished to find that the letter was rather longer than usual, and that it contained a sentence referring to possible matrimonial intentions on my part. My uncle informed me that I was probably thinking of getting married, and if I was not so minded, I ought to be; that he knew by experience that a bachelor's life was not the best and meant to see that I did not fall into the same error as he; and that I would please to write and let him know how matters stood. The letter concluded with a vague hint that he might do something for me if I married.

I was at first annoyed, because it seemed like cheek on his part, seeing that he had done nothing for me, and that I was getting on tolerably well without the "something" which he thought of doing. My annoyance turned to amusement, however, and I resolved to have a game with the old chap, I wrote to him, telling him that I had anticipated his question by a year, and was the father of a bouncing baby boy, just arrived on this planet.

I chuckled as I dropped that letter into the pillar-box; it did not occur to me that I was telling a big fib; I regarded it as a joke. I forgot all about the matter till a week later, when I received a baby's spoon and mug, all of gold, and a letter of congratulation, and a remark to the effect that I ought to have waited till I was twenty-one before marrying. I then remembered that twenty was rather young for marriage.

I felt rather guilty as I wrote the letter of thanks, but I comforted myself with the reflection that I should never see the old fellow, who would fall back into the one-epistle-a-year custom. But I couldn't keep that spoon and mug! Gracious, suppose any of the fellows were to find out that I had such an outfit among my belongings! Moreover, I was rather hard up then, having run through my quarterly allowance quickly; so I sneaked off to a pawnbroker in another part and turned that spoon and mug into sovereigns.

About nine months later, misfortune overtook me in the form of failure of the firm in which my father's money was invested, and I saw myself not only without money, but also without a situation. In the end, I had to accept a clerkship in the establishment of one of our firm's creditors.

This drop in the world necessitated a change in my mode of living, and I immediately looked round for less pretentious lodgings. I inserted an advertisement and received a lot of replies, but the only one that appealed to me in my somewhat dejected frame of mind, was that of a widow in a quiet suburb, and I decided to go there. She had no other boarders; she had a small house and wished to supplement an equally small income by taking in a boarder.

"She will be a sort of mother to me," I said to myself. "I want someone like that."

I could give good references, and the matter was practically settled without an interview, for I was too sad to care much about the kind of lodging; but I just called on her before actually removing, and was surprised to find that the widow was a young woman about a year older than myself. Quite an attractive woman, was Mrs. Hanbury.

While I was in the midst of packing my things, some to be taken to my new lodgings and others to be sold, a letter was placed in my hand.

"Italian stamp!" I growled, rather irritably. "Oh, yes! The usual birthday effusion! I knew he would fall back into that custom. He hasn't written to me since that spoon and mug affair, so that proves I'm right!"

It did not strike me that it was not quite a year since the last birthday communication. I was half inclined to tear it up without opening it, but finally thrust it into the pocket of my knockabout jacket, unopened, with other papers. "I'll read it later," I muttered.

I was soon comfortable in my new home, and Mrs. Hanbury was very pleasant. I didn't like the idea of a baby in the house especially when it cried in the middle of the night, but one gets accustomed to everything, and one Saturday afternoon I actually volunteered to look after the little chap, as he lay asleep in the cradle, while his mother went out shopping.

"Hallo! Why, I never opened that letter of Uncle Tom's!" I exclaimed, as the remembrance of it flashed across me. "It's a month old. I stuffed it in this pocket, didn't I? Yes, here it is. I wish the old chap would do something for me, for I don't seem to get on very well!"

I sighed heavily as I admitted the fact. I had not been brought up for clerking. I wasn't much good at it, and I had no aptitude for it. I stood a very good chance of getting the sack. I couldn't entirely blame myself; I knew of several occupations that would suit me better, but where could I get the chance?

I read the letter and gasped. Uncle Tom was coming to London, and wanted to see my wife and baby. "I don't like the foggy place," he wrote, "but it won't hurt me at this time of the year. I told you I would do something for you and your family if you married, and I'm coming to do it! I shall be in London by the tenth of next month, and will call on you at once to see that you are acting as the son of your father, and my nephew, should act!"

And this was the eleventh! I hadn't told him of the change of fortune and address, but he would soon hear of that from my last lodgings and he would come on here. The old man seemed to be awaking to the fact that he had a duty to perform towards me, and he would relieve me from my present position. I jumped up with a shout, then sank back with a cry of despair. That little trick of mine would spoil all my chances, for he would never forgive me for deceiving him!

A tremendous ring at the bell; a ring that can only be given by two people—the beggar and the man who thinks that the house belongs to him. I guessed at once that it was my uncle at the door.

I glared wildly about, as if seeking some way out of the dilemma; I thought of bolting over the back wall, but that appeared a poor way out. Then an idea took possession of me and, without further reflection, I decided to adopt it. Another furious ring sent me hurrying to the front door.

"My dear uncle!" I cried, seizing his hand and shaking it violently. I recognised him by his resemblance to an old portrait. "But, please, you mustn't ring so hard or you will wake the cherub."

His angry expression faded away.

"I'm very sorry, Bob!" he said apologetically. "I know you're Bob, because you've got your father's nose and forehead. I clean forgot the little creature! Ah, I made a great mistake when I was young, my boy! Bachelorhood is——"

I hustled him effusively into the passage and into the parlour. He hadn't time to ask why the door was not opened more quickly, why I hadn't told him of my change of address, or anything else. And I was hoping that I could get him out of the place again in a few minutes. I would swear that the local climate was bad for his complaint, whatever it was. Just imagine my predicament if Mrs. Hanbury returned while I was exhibiting her baby as mine!

"Ugh!" grunted uncle Tom, as he let himself fall into a chair and nearly broke it. "It's chilly here. No fire? Where's my niece? Where's the baby? It's sure to be cold here. Why don't you let me see the child?"

I was about to observe that he hadn't given me time to answer his questions or do anything else, but I refrained. If he were in a hurry, so much the better for me.

I ran into the next room and came staggering in with the cradle, in which the one-year-old was sitting up in a lively manner. I had not dared to take him out and carry him in my arms, for I positively didn't quite know how to manage it. I said hard things to myself for not having practised the art of carrying a baby.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed my uncle, with astonished eyes. "Is the child a cripple? Why don't you let him run about. Not old enough? H'm! Suppose not, but can't you carry him without all *that?*"

I set the cradle down and whistled to the child, trying to coax it to look at uncle. Then it began to cry.

"Take it up, man!" said uncle.

"Hush-a-by!" I hummed in desperation, taking the bundle of humanity in my arms. "Here, Billy, Harry, or whatever your name is, look at unky!"

"Don't you know the name of your own child?" demanded Uncle Tom.

I felt like throwing the baby at him and bolting. The little creature didn't seem to care two straws about unky.

"Turn his face to you, can't you?" was uncle's next inquiry. "Whoever saw a father hold a baby so that he looked at the back of its head?"

I had had an idea I wasn't holding the thing right, somehow. I turned the bundle round and nearly dropped it in so doing, which made my supposed offspring yell.

"Here, give it to me!" cried Uncle Tom scornfully. "Call yourself a father? I believe I can do it better. Where's your—I mean *its* mother?"

I explained that we were not able to keep a servant, and that the child's mother had gone shopping. I couldn't bring myself, just then, to telling a deliberate lie and speaking of Mrs. Hanbury as "my wife." I handed the struggling lump of flesh and garments to the grim old man, and I am bound to admit that he nursed the child better than I. It ceased crying, and made a grab at his whiskers, a sure sign of friendliness.

"It isn't the least bit like you!" pronounced Uncle Tom dubiously. "Resembles its mother, eh?"

Then my hair nearly stood on end, for I heard the sound of a key in the lock of the front door. It was Mrs. Hanbury returning from her shopping. Unless I could get a word with her and win her over to my plan, the game was up. Why had she come back so soon? My luck was out, and I heartily wished that I had never deceived my estimable relative. I heard the door shut and I understood that I must act promptly.

"Here she comes!" I cried, with assumed joy. "I'll tell her you're here, uncle, and that you can't stop long!"

Of course, the last words were a hint to him to go, for the longer he stayed, the more difficult it would be to keep up the farce. Farce! It looked like being a tragedy for me!

"Oh, I'm not in a hurry, Jack!" I heard him sing out after me, as I left the room. "Chuck, chuck!"

That was to the baby; they were getting on splendidly together. "Suppose Uncle Tom should be so favourably impressed that he should decide to stay in London for a week or two and visit us frequently? Suppose he should want us to put him up!" I groaned.

"What's the matter, Mr. Braby?" asked Mrs. Hanbury anxiously, her thoughts clearly flying to the baby. "Is there anything the matter with him?"

"He's got him on his knee," I replied, mixing up the personages. "Uncle, I mean."

"Uncle, Mr. Braby?" she queried in surprise.

"Yes, yes!" I cried feverishly. "But you'll have to call me 'Jack,' you know."

She actually blushed and dropped her eyes as she stammered:

"Isn't it rather sudden, Mr. Braby? I hadn't any idea—that is, I only thought——"

Then she stopped and I felt inclined to groan again. Here I was, getting myself into a breach of promise case as fast as I could. I began to anathematise Uncle Tom under my breath. There was no help for it, so I boldly took the bull by the horns and explained matters to Mrs. Hanbury. And, in common justice to her, I ought to say that I had never before noticed how really charming she was!

"I am afraid that you have got into an awkward fix, Mr. Braby," she remarked, when I had finished. Her eyes twinkled mischievously. "I am sorry for you, all the same, and I'll try to help you."

I could have hugged her, but that would have settled the breach of promise case at once. I led her into the room, and said in a hearty tone:

"Now I can introduce you, uncle!"

Which was exactly what I didn't do, for I said nothing more.

It was a poor sort of salve to my conscience, as I did not desire to tell more fibs than were necessary. Uncle fell into the trap.

"I'm pleased to see you, my dear!" He was quite affable, which was explicable by the fact that the young widow was a very charming person. Her husband had died when the baby was only a week old, so that (fortunately for my deception) there was only a trace of mourning in her dress. "Excuse my not rising! Your fine son is engaging my attention."

I thought at first that Mrs. Hanbury did not much like acting the part, but when we went into the kitchen to prepare tea, for Uncle Tom had declared his intention of staying till dark, I discovered that she didn't much mind.

"I hope you won't mind playing the part of my wife," I began, and then I stopped.

"It doesn't seem so very hard a part to play, and I think I should soon get used to it!" she answered, dropping her eyes and blushing.

I looked at her half-averted face, and a new sentiment appeared to spring up within my breast. I took her hand

in mine, causing her to let the bread drop to the floor, and raised her face to mine.

"Wouldn't it?" I asked tenderly.

And then, goodness knows what would have happened if we hadn't heard baby cry. At least, she said she heard him cry and she ran out of the room; but I heard nothing and, between ourselves, I have my doubts!

Well, she came back and said that I had better help my uncle to mind baby while she got the tea ready. But I wasn't anxious to be cross-questioned and I resolved to let him amuse himself with the baby as long as he would.

We had tea, and Uncle Tom quite blossomed into a good-humoured fellow. All went well enough till tea was finished—it was a long affair—and he intimated his intention of going. I began to breathe a sigh of relief and to invent some excuse for preventing him from coming here again.

"Well, Jack," he began, speaking with the satisfaction of one who has the power of doing you a good turn and means to exercise that power, and wants you to appreciate it. "I am sorry to hear that you have fallen on evil days, and I mean to do something that will set you up again. Further, I intend to place some money to the credit of your wife's name, just to show my appreciation of her charming qualities, and because it's well that a wife should have some independent means. I admire your choice, my boy!" He looked with evident admiration at Mrs. Hanbury. "Yes, and now I want to know her name."

Then, like a great idiot, I clean forgot the situation, and said:

"Mrs. Hanbury."

Whatever occasioned that fit of mental aberration, I am unable to say, but I think that I had not recovered from that incident in the kitchen, when—— But no matter!

Of course uncle stared at me blankly.

"That isn't her Christian name!" he declared. "What do you mean?"

"Christian name?" I gasped, awaking to a sense of what I had done. "It's——" Then I remembered that I had never heard it!

Uncle Tom glared at me for a few seconds, then spoke slowly.

"You didn't know the baby's name, and you don't know your wife's! Now, what does all this mean?"

"I believe I heard baby cry!" declared Mrs. Hanbury. Baby had been taken upstairs in his cradle, and I imagined that she was about to escape and leave me to brave the thing out, but she pushed me towards the door as she continued: "Go and see what's wrong!"

I am not a coward, but I gladly left her to work things right; women are so much cleverer than men at that sort of thing.

There wasn't a sound from the infant, so I waited on the stairs and listened for some signs of life from the parlour. Presently I heard a loud laugh from uncle and I concluded that it was safe to return.

"Oh, here you are, Jack! Well, I'm in the secret now, and it serves you right that you have had such a bad hour or two this afternoon. Still, I'll forgive you! I was always ready for a practical joke myself in my young days, and perhaps I should have done the same if I had found myself in such a tight place. But I'll only overlook it on one condition, that's all! That is, that you—— There, you don't need me to tell you, surely."

He pushed me towards Mrs. Hanbury, who tried to get away, but I had her in my arms and kissed her, right in front of Uncle Tom!

"And that spoon and mug, you rascal? Pawned it, I'll be bound! Never mind, I'll get another for that little creature in the cradle, that I will!"

He was as good as his word. He stayed in England till we were married, and when he left for Italy I was, thanks to him, in a position that rendered it unnecessary for me to retain my clerkship.

George Day.

HOW TO GET A SLENDER WAIST, AND HOW TO KEEP IT.

If some good fairy godmother could tell the women of to-day that they might each choose one constituent of beauty, in addition to what they already possess, I believe a large majority would ask for the gift of a good figure with a slender waist. But alas and alack! there are no fairies to be heard, save those of science, and they tell us that the corsets with which we have been wont to try to keep our figures trim are injurious to health, and that if we would be really beautiful in the matter of figure, we must actually get rid of all superfluous fat and not try to squeeze it out of sight. How is it to be done? The clear answer is to be found in a little book written by Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, who has been scientifically studying the question for many years, making many experiments, and who can now show a record of thousands of cures that he has effected by his wonderful treatment of obesity. Mr. Russell's treatment, unlike all others, is pleasant as well as harmless, and does not interfere with one's ordinary habits. It ensures a reduction of from ½lb. to 2lbs. per day until ordinary proportions of weight and size are regained, when the treatment may be discontinued. Let me advise all who desire to get and to retain a graceful figure, to send the above author two penny stamps to cover the postage of his book, "Corpulency and the Cure," which he will then present to anyone who asks for it.

A HINT TO STOUT LADIES.

Ladies are constantly complaining that they cannot retain their youthfulness of figure without either taking rigorous exercise in the gymnasium, wearing strongly-boned and tightly-laced corsets, or going in for a course of semi-starvation, to all of which they feel there are the strongest objections. And it is well that these objections are heeded, for all such drastic and exhausting methods of overcoming obesity, or of checking its approach, are weakening and debilitating in the extreme, and if persevered in may leave lasting evil effects upon the system. Very different, indeed, is the simple and healthful method of *permanently* reducing a too rotund figure to beautiful proportions known as the "Russell" treatment. By means of this wonderful system the first day's reduction amounts to from ½lb. to 2lbs., and this decrease continues daily in the same ratio until normal size and weight are attained. The fullest particulars of the system are set forth by the originator, Mr. F. Cecil Russell, in his admirable book entitled "Corpulency and the Cure," which he will be pleased to give to any applicant who sends him her address, and the cost of the postage of the book, two penny stamps. For the benefit of our stout friends we append Mr. Russell's address: Woburn House, Store Street, Bedford Square, London, W.C.

The Troubles of a Lord.

ROSY: "It can never be. You are so much higher than I in station, Lord Verigrene." Lord Roderic Verigrene: "But, Wosy—don't call me Lord Vewigwene, call me Wodewic—I love you twuly and honouwably. It's no fault of mine that I'm a lord, and above you in station. Oh, I wish I'd been born a shoe-black! Then p'waps, you'd think me your equal! No! no! I——"

Diplomacy.

MOTHER: "So you wish my daughter for your wife?" He (gallantly): "Partly that, madam, and partly that you may be my mother-in-law."

A Strategist.

WIFE: "John, there's a long red hair on your arm—and your sleeve is ripped, too." "Yes, dear, I put the hair on there myself, so that you'd notice the tear."

Another Matter.

SHE: "Engaged to two girls at the same time! Well, what are you going to do about it?" He: "Oh, I am all right, but what are they going to do about it?"

Had Pretty Bridesmaids.

SHE (after the wedding): "Let's extend our wedding tour to the United States, so we can see the Salt Lake City." He: "Good idea; let's take the bridesmaids along."

And He Was.

"No, stop!" she said; "I won't allow you, Alphonso, you must not kiss me; and you can't unless you are stronger than I am." Her voice was filled with indignation. "But," she added, "I know you are stronger than I am."

A New Meaning.

LITTLE JOHNNY: "W'en Miss Noxdor got married her mother threw an old slipper after her. What was that for?" Little Ethel: "Oh, they always do that. That means that her mamma isn't never goin' to spank her any more."

What He was Doing.

"WHAT are you doin', you young rascal?" said a farmer to a remarkably small boy on finding him under a tree in his orchard with an apple in his hand. "Please, sir, I was only goin' to put this ere apple back on the tree, sir; it had fallen down, sir."

A Sisterly Kiss.

"I SHALL go straight home to my mother, Mr. Bicks, I saw you kissing Mrs. Habberton-Browns in the conservatory." "It was only a sisterly kiss, my dear." "She is not your sister." "Yes she is—that is, she promised to be one to me years ago."

Going to Press.

VOICE from the head of the stairs: "Mary, has the morning paper come yet?" Mary (who has just begun to say good-bye to George): "How shall I answer him, my dear?" George: "Tell him, of course, the paper hasn't come yet, as we are just going to press now."

Very Cute.

A YOUNG woman was making some purchases in a stationer's shop when the proprietor suddenly asked: "And when does the wedding take place?" "The wedding? Why, you don't think——" The fair customer blushed and hesitated. "Ah, when young ladies buy a hundred sheets of paper and only twenty-five envelopes, I know there is something in the wind!"

A Circulating Heart.

"MISS BUDD'S heart is like a volume in a circulating library." "How is that?" "Not to be kept longer than two weeks."

A Cheerful Outlook.

SHE: "It will be a pleasure for me to share your troubles and anxieties." He: "But I haven't any." She: "Oh, you will have when we are married."

Caustic.

MRS. BELLA DONNA: "My husband ages much more rapidly than I do." Mrs. Plaster (ambiguously): "Of course, he has so much more to worry him."

Married Clerks Preferred.

MERCHANT: "I always give the preference to a married clerk." Friend: "Why is that?" "Because I find that they are not in such a hurry to get home of an evening as the others are."

All Out.

REPORTER: "Can I see Mrs. B?" Servant: "She's out, sir." Reporter: "One of the family, then?" Servant: "All out, sir." Reporter: "Well, wasn't there a fire here last night?" Servant: "Yes; but that's out, too."

Smoke and Scent.

HE (angrily): "Look at this bill. Four pounds for perfumery—for mere odours that fade away for ever." She calmly): "Gone to meet the smoke from the eight pounds' worth of cigars you have consumed during the last three months."

An Unsuspected Quality.

FEATHERSTONE: "Well, old man, I am glad to hear that you are engaged to be married. Falling in love, sir, brings out qualities in a man that he never suspected." Ringway: "I agree with you. I never knew before" (sadly) "that I had the capacity for spending so much money."

How He Economised.

SHE: "As we are going to be married in August, don't you think you ought to begin to economise?" He: "Oh, I've begun already. That very thought occurred to me this evening as I was coming here." She: "What did you do?" He: "Passed the sweet shop without stopping."

He Knew Her.

MR. SCRIMPS: "I asked your daughter a very important question last night, and she referred me to you." Old Gentleman: "Humph! What did you ask her?" "I asked her if she would marry me." "Well, she won't." "Eh? Has she said so?" "No; but from what I know of the girl I don't believe she would have bothered herself about me if she had really wanted you."

And no Wonder.

MRS. JONES and Mrs. Brown were chatting together over the wall. "Really," said Mrs. Jones, "I think your baby is the sweetest creature on earth." "He's a darling boy," replied the fond mother, "just look at his tiny little nose, and his funny fat cheeks, and his beautiful bald head, and his fat podgy hands. Upon my word, Mrs. Jones, I think he gets more like his father every day." But his father (who had overheard the above conversation) said, and emphatically too, "that he didn't like comparisons of that sort."

How it Happened.

JOHNSON: "I've been sued for breach of promise of marriage by a deaf and dumb girl, and I want to put in a general denial." Lawyer: "Did you ever propose marriage to her?" Johnson: "Well, she insists that I did, and in the sign language, but I didn't." Lawyer: "What were you doing when she claims you were making an offer of marriage?" Johnson: "I was talking to her about the weather, and, in the middle of it, I put my thumb out of joint, and before I could put it in again I may have made some signs that I didn't intend, and put my foot in it."

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A Marvellous Invention.

"I HAVE a little invention I should like to show you," said an old fellow, ambling into the editor's room, carrying a good-sized bundle.

"See you later," said the editor, "call again when I'm not so busy."

"But you gentlemen are always busy," said the old fellow, commencing to unroll his bundle, "and you might as well look at my invention now as any other time, and it won't take more than a minute or so."

"Couldn't think of it," said the editor, "you have come in at the busiest part of the day. Step in again about half-past six, or make it later."

"You see I'm not staying in town many days," said the old fellow, "and it's now or never, if you wish to inspect what I think is——"

"Make it never," said the editor.

"No!" said the old fellow, tugging at a cord about the bundle; "I appreciate the influence of your paper too highly to miss the chance of advertising my invention through its pages, and thus benefiting a much larger public——"

"Come, shut up!" said the editor. "Can't you see that I'm too busy to think about your invention?"

"But you will regret it for life if you don't take a look at it," said the old fellow. "And when I become famous you will reproach me for not insisting upon your giving me a lift at the start. You see my machine is something that must eventually come into use in every household. I know if your wife could see it she would insist upon your purchasing one, and giving it a good notice into the bargain. I call it the self-acting electric egg-beater. First you screw it on the table like——"

"Here, don't spoil the furniture," said the editor, rising in a threatening manner.

"Not in the least," said the old fellow. "You see, there are pads on the face of the clamps, and by touching the spring we set the machine in motion."

"Don't touch it," shouted the editor, pushing back his chair; but it was too late, and a long, heavy bar attached to the machine began to whirl round, upsetting the ink, and scattering the manuscripts in all directions.

"Well, that's odd," said the old fellow. "There must be something out of order. You see this bar beats the egg, and it should have a different motion. The spring underneath here sets the motive power——"

"Will you take that infernal machine away, or shall I call in the police and have you run in pretty quickly?" shouted the editor.

"That is very strange," said the old fellow, as the bar whirled round and caught him just below the eye. "I'll just try this spring at the right, and perhaps we shall get a different effect."

"Leave!" shouted the editor.

"That must be attended to," said the old fellow, as the bar hit the desk a tremendous thump, splitting it from end to end. "Now you see the action of one of the laws of gravitation."

"I'll teach you something about laws," shouted the editor, springing forward and walking the inventor to the head of the stairs and giving him a persuader that landed the old fellow in a confused and terribly forlorn heap on the bottom step.

"You—you'll regret this—when I—I become fa—mous," groaned the old man, gathering himself together and looking up at the editor. "I—I have another in—invention—" But just here the cashier got in his work, and the old fellow was landed out of harm's way on the pavement, just as his patent egg-beater sailed through the window and fell a wreck by his side.

L. Parkyn.

Why is Sand Yellow?

A CERTAIN learned professor is devoting his time to discovering why the sand by the seashore is yellow? Speaking of discoveries, calls to mind how many thousands of sufferers from anæmia, biliousness, and debility, have discovered in Bile Beans a perfect cure. One of these is Miss E. J. Marshall, of Grosvenor Crescent, South Cliff, Scarborough. To a reporter of the *Scarborough Mercury*, she said: "Some time ago I was suffering from indigestion, biliousness, and general debility. For days together I would have attacks of biliousness, and for eight long months I was in a shocking state. I could not eat, I felt always utterly wretched and tired. Medicines did me no good, and I went from bad to worse. One day I read about Bile Beans. I thought I would give them a trial, and I did. I had only taken a few boxes when I felt that I was gradually recovering my health. I persevered with the Beans, taking them regularly, and the result was that, in a comparatively short time, I was free from the ailments which had tortured me for so long. I am now quite well, and never have any return of the old pain." All chemists stock Bile Beans for Biliousness, or you may obtain them post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co.'s head English Depot, 119 London Wall, E.C., for one-and-three-half-pence or two-and-nine a box. For indigestion, bilious attacks, sick headache, liver and kidney disorders, neuralgia, bronchitis, all female ailments, palpitation, anæmia, constipation, piles, pains in the back and chest, and nervous and general debility, they have no equal; also for skin eruptions, pimples, and the host of ailments arising out of impurity of the blood, a general congestion of the system, and loss of vital force.

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JONES, A.B.

A Charming Little Love Tale of the Sea.

The liner *Silesian* was ploughing her way through a blue expanse of waters, and Miss Ruth Templeton sat in a low chair upon the hurricane deck with a book on her knee, and her eyes upon the tall figure of one of the sailors. She had noticed him more than once, yet now, as she regarded him half dreamily, she became conscious for the first time of something strangely attractive about the man's face, with its strong, firm mouth, steadfast eyes, and hair that curled in little tight rings upon his broad forehead.

Suddenly he glanced up, and their eyes met, and Miss Templeton continued her reading with a half sense of annoyance.

"Ridiculous!" she said to herself, though what it was that she thought so ridiculous did not appear.

Miss Ruth Templeton was a young lady of considerable fortune, and had created no small stir in society circles; but, growing tired of all the flattery and adulation, she had left England quietly, and was on her way to Aden, where she was to meet her uncle, Admiral Templeton, her only living relative. Thus it came about that Miss Ruth Templeton lay back in her deck-chair on that fateful afternoon, dreamily watching the broad shoulders of the retreating sailor—and that Jones, able seaman, had gone about his duties for the last few days with certain visions of mischievous dark eyes that looked out from beneath tresses of rebellious brown hair.

Somehow or other Ruth's interest in her reading had vanished, so tucking her book under her arm she rose to her feet, and looked about for something to do. The decks were comparatively deserted, and, glancing round, she decided to make for the stern, and watch the froth and swirl of the wake. Acting on this suggestion she had climbed the ladder, and almost reached the taffrail, when a tall figure confronted her.

"Excuse me," said Jones, A.B., in his quiet voice, "but you cannot pass."

"Cannot pass!" repeated Ruth, "and why not, pray?"

"We recently had a slight accident with the taffrail, and it is dangerous."

"But I want to!" she said.

"I'm very sorry!" he answered, still barring her way, and she fancied there was the suspicion of a smile upon his clean-shaven lips.

"Will you please allow me to pass?" she said severely.

"I'm very sorry," he repeated, "but I'm afraid I can't. I am ordered to let no one pass."

Something in the quiet tones of his voice annoyed her.

"Stand aside!" she said imperiously.

"Impossible, madam!" he answered coolly, without moving.

"You forget your position—you are insolent!" she exclaimed, angrily turning her back upon him, and Jones, A.B., noted, with a degree of pleasure, how the hair curled in little tendrils behind her ears.

Miss Ruth Templeton, unused to being thwarted, stood with a frown of thought upon her brows. "How could she outwit this very annoying young man?" she pondered. Then in a moment the frown vanished and a smile took its place, she turned towards him as if about to speak and let fall her book at his feet as if by accident.

He stooped to pick it up, as she had expected, and in a flash she was past him, and had almost reached the forbidden goal, when her foot tripped in a rope — something snapped beneath her, and, with a cry, she had disappeared in the swirling water below. She rose to the surface with a roaring in her ears, and, half-blinded by the spume, could distinguish the *Silesian*, which was rapidly leaving her. A cry of anguish escaped her, her heavy skirts were dragging her under; she struggled wildly for a moment, and then her eyes closed and she felt herself sinking. Suddenly a hand seized her, a strong arm was thrown about her, and, looking up, Ruth saw a face framed in wet, black hair—the face of Jones, A.B. And with his eyes looking into hers, and his arm tight about her, a sudden sense of security came to her and her terror was forgotten.

Almost immediately it seemed to her a boat had reached them and eager hands were outstretched to her. For a brief instant ere relinquishing its hold, the arm about her tightened, and then she was lifted in, and, wet and miserable, rowed back to the ship.

Once safe on board she looked round the circle of congratulatory faces for that of her rescuer, but Jones, A.B., had vanished.

For two days she was confined to her cabin, but on the third, braving the doctor, she insisted upon going on deck, and Jeanette, her maid, having made her a nest in a secluded corner, and put plenty of books within reach, left her to attend to her own business, which consisted chiefly in conversing with one of the stewards.

Ruth glanced about towards the groups of sailors, but Jones, A.B., was not on deck. "Was he ill?" she wondered. The thought was unpleasant, moreover remembering certain words she had said, her conscience pricked her; she wished he would appear that she might explain and thank him.

She opened a book and tried to read, but, somehow, she could only lie and repeat to herself those unkind words of hers —"you forget your position—you are insolent!"

The ribbon on her hair had come loose, she pulled it off with a little petulant gesture and laid it upon her open book.

The afternoon sunshine was warm about her, and with the gentle wind in her hair and the soft, rhythmic throb of the propeller in her ears, she fell asleep.

Thus, when Jones, A.B., came upon her in her quiet corner some time later, he did not hesitate to pause a moment to gaze upon the lovely sleeping face, with the fringe of dark lashes upon the pale cheek, and the proud curve of the lips. Suddenly his eye caught something that lay neglected at her feet, and he went on his way smoothing a crumpled hair-ribbon with tender fingers.

Ruth was awakened by Jeanette summoning her to dinner in her state-room.

"Madame is not looking well," said the voluble Jeanette, as her mistress made a pretence of eating, "and to-morrow we reach Aden. What will monsieur the Admiral—her uncle—think of her pale cheeks?"

"To-morrow!" echoed Ruth; so soon, and she became oblivious to the merry chatter of Jeanette, remembering with a pang that all this time she had not so much as uttered one word of thanks to the man who had risked his life for hers, and after to-morrow she would see him no more.

(*Continued on page 767.*)

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The black day is fast approaching—the day which will long remain in the publishing world as a day of mystery—for Messrs. Hammond, Hammond & Co., the Publishers of Professor Boyd Laynard's world-renowned work, "SECRETS OF BEAUTY, HEALTH, AND LONG LIFE," have received instructions from the author to shortly withdraw all cheap editions of his famous book. No reason is given by the distinguished author for his action. The present stock is not over large, and the publishers feel that all SHORT STORIES readers who have not yet secured a copy are entitled to this offer, which will probably be their last opportunity.

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"Give me a wrap, Jeanette," she said suddenly.

"Is Madame, then, going out into the cold?" cried Jeanette, raising hands of affected horror. "Ah! but it is unwise—a good night's rest——"

"I am waiting, Jeanette. My wrap please. No, you need not accompany me."

A pale moon was rising as Ruth reached the deck, and avoiding the promenade, with its lights and voices, made her way to her favourite corner, and sank with a sigh into the vacant chair.

She sat for a while, staring out over the dim mystery of the sea, and so far away were her thoughts, that her wrap slipped unnoticed from her shoulders, until a shiver reminding her, she was in the act of stooping for it when someone paused beside her, and looking up she beheld Jones, A.B.

"Allow me!" he said in his quiet voice, at the same time adjusting the shawl about her with dexterous fingers, and a matter-of-fact air.

"Stop, please," she said, as he turned to go.

"I hope you are better," he said, pausing obediently.

"Oh, yes, thank you," she answered hurriedly, "what I wanted to see you for was to thank you, and tell you how sorry I am for—for——"

"It certainly was awfully wrong of you, you know," he said in his solemn way.

"Yes, I suppose it was," she agreed meekly—"but what I meant was that I ought not to have said—I did not mean those horrid things about—about your position."

His lips quivered into a smile. "It was nothing," he said gently, "please do not think of it."

"Oh!" she burst out, "how can I ever thank you sufficiently?"

"Why should you?" he asked quietly. "I am happy to have been of service to you."

"But I want to thank you, oh, so much," she persisted. "I want you to see I am grateful to you."

"Thank you," he answered gravely.

"If you only could know how horribly frightened I was," she continued, looking up at him with shining eyes. "Oh! I can never—never repay you."

He met her glance for a moment, and then as if scarce trusting his own, looked away into grey distance.

The silver moon had climbed higher, and the soft strains of dreamy music floated to them from the distant saloon.

"And we reach Aden to-morrow?" she asked, without looking up.

"To-morrow morning," he answered.

"I am glad I saw you," she said softly. "I could not have gone away without trying to—to thank you, and I can never forget that you saved my life."

"And I," he said very slowly, "shall never forget you to my death."

He turned and lifted his hat. As he did so a strange thing happened. Something that fluttered loose from its wrapping of paper fell upon the deck at her feet.

The moonlight was strong by now, and Ruth beheld—her hair ribbon.

The brow of Jones, A.B., grew red beneath its bronze, and he stood before her like a big detected schoolboy.

"Yes," he said after a pause, seeing she did not speak, "it is your hair ribbon. I stole it this afternoon while you were asleep. Presumptuous, I know, I am, but is it not enough that I have held you once in my arms, and—I have loved you longer than you can guess."

He stopped, awaiting the fiery outburst of her indignation.

With the quiet, passionless voice in her ears, Ruth sat twisting the crumpled ribbon on nervous fingers, and for a long moment after he had spoken there was silence, then she looked up at him.

What he read in her eyes who shall say? But in that moment the stern self-repression of the man was swept away, his arms closed about her, and his lips were upon hers. Then he had released her and stood back, with the old look battling with the new.

"Do you remember my position?" he said slowly. "Have you forgotten that I am only a common seaman?"

"I forget nothing," said Ruth rising, and advancing with hands outstretched to him, "only I know I love you."

* * * * *

If during that night Ruth's sleep was haunted by thoughts of an indignant uncle, and the stir that such a marriage would create in society, she resolutely put such ideas aside as unworthy.

Thus when she awoke to find Jeanette beside her with her morning coffee, and full of the news that Aden was in sight, her misgivings had ceased to worry her altogether.

The *Silesian* was safe in dock, and a gangway had been run up, as she reached the deck, and almost the first thing that met her eyes was the portly form of the Admiral, her uncle, deep in conversation with the Captain.

They turned and saw her, as she approached, and the Admiral, running forward, kissed her in his hearty, affectionate way.

"What's all this they tell me?" he cried, "about falling overboard. Hoity-toity!"

"All on account of the culpable neglect of one of the seamen,' said the Captain, "whom I reprimanded severely."

"But it was not his fault," began Ruth earnestly, "the blame was wholly mine."

"And you say the young beggar made up for it by saving this very wilful young lady's life. I should like to see him."

"Well, there he is," said the Captain, pointing out a passing seaman. The Admiral stared, fixed his monocle with a jerk, and stared harder.

"Eh! what? Egad!" he cried, and hurrying forward with his great hearty sea laugh, he was next moment boisterously shaking hands with Jones, A.B.

Ruth stood thunderstruck, well knowing the Admiral's fixed ideas regarding rank, and her amazement grew as he advanced towards them, still laughing and talking with his companion; then she was dimly conscious of her uncle's voice in her ears.

"My dear," it said, "let me introduce to you my friend Lord Brampton of Deering. When you know more of his lordship you will cease to be surprised at him, he is always doing something eccentric. You may meet him at a reception one day, and hear of him 'cow punching' in Mexico a month later."

His lordship laughed. "Well, Sir George, under certain circumstances I fancy my roving tendencies may be curbed once and for all," and his eyes met Ruth's as he spoke.

"So it seems I shall have to discharge you, my lord," said the Captain, and linking his arm in the Admiral's, the two old friends strolled off together.

"And so you are not a common seaman, after all?" said Ruth, as they leant over the bulwarks watching the busy quay.

"I'm afraid not," said his lordship, covertly slipping his hand over hers, "but you can love me just as much?"

"I don't know," she answered slowly, looking up with eyes full of mischief, "because you know, I have fallen in love with Jones, A.B."

Jeffery Farnol.

A NEW COMPETITION.

Here is a competition which everyone can go in for. All that is wanted is an ordinary sheet of notepaper, a pair of scissors, and a little ingenuity. What you have to do is to cut out the prettiest design you can from one piece of notepaper, without using either pins or paste.

The **First Prize** for the prettiest design is a really **Handsome Barbaric Guard**, while the competitors whose efforts come second and third will receive extremely pretty **Rolled Gold Hearts**, those coming fourth and fifth being presented with **Dainty Little Charms**. Gentlemen readers should win these prizes to present to their sweetheart or wife. The competition closes on June 17th. Designs should be addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, in envelopes marked "**Design.**"

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

The Unwelcome Suitor.

"Gertrude" believes that her parents and relatives are determined to marry her to a young man whom she does not care for in the least. With this object in view, a party has been arranged this summer, at which she will be largely thrown in his way. She does not want to have to deliberately refuse him, and asks me how she can avoid unpleasantness.

❦❦❦

Are there to be any other men at the party? If so, you might, to prevent embarrassment, show much more pointed attentions towards them, in a way which should discourage your unwelcome suitor. If there are not other men, attach yourself firmly to other girls present, and give the objectionable one as little chance of being alone with you as possible. As a very last resource, have you not a brother or male cousin who could be present at the party, who will be sufficiently in sympathy with you as to help you to baffle the enemy?

❦❦❦

Stage Hero-Worship.

"Hopeless" tells me she is desperately in love with a very well-known actor. This infatuation has been discovered by some of her friends, who tell her that it is immodest and unwomanly for a girl to fall in love with those far beyond her station.

❦❦❦

Certainly, "Hopeless," you do not deserve such cruel names. It is not unnatural that a powerful actor like the one you mention should have made you spell-bound. But do not delude yourself with any hope that such an affair can lead to anything. Why not be content, like many others, to worship him as a hero? After all, it is probably only his stage-self you are in love with. As a man, quite possibly he would cease to exercise any such spell.

❦❦❦

You will soon grow out of this infatuation, as you are only eighteen, and in a year or two will no doubt meet the right man in real life. Meanwhile, why not cure your present distraction by going and seeing as many other actors as possible. You will, by this means, see that there are many other men on the stage equally splendid, and realise that falling in love with them, "in the paint and powder," is just as foolish as losing your heart to a hero in a novel, or, for that matter, a statue.

❦❦❦

"Once Bit, Twice Shy."

I think, "F. C." (Bangor), you will discover that the old proverb, "Once bit, twice shy," is likely to hold good in the case, of the young man who has been in a breach of promise case, but has now started an affair with your sister. I certainly think he will have benefitted by his experience, and will be very careful against its occurring again. Your sister, if she is fond of him, should delicately hint that in her case his intentions must be serious, or she will not hesitate to act as the other young lady did, and this will soon put to the real test whether the man is honourable or not. Perhaps you, as her brother, might hint something to the same effect.

❦❦❦

Must have a V.C.

"Harry W." has a very exacting sweetheart. He has just returned from the front, and finds that his young lady has jilted him because he has not won the Victoria Cross.

If "Harry" were a courtier, he should have replied, "No, I place my hopes in winning something infinitely more valuable, that is yourself." But if she seriously means what she says, I certainly should not follow the suit, were I "Harry." If is apparent that it is not him that she loves, but a decorated ornament, and I should refer her to the nearest dealer in those goods.

❦❦❦

Should Consumptives Marry?

"Distracted" has been engaged to a girl for some time, but only recently he has discovered that there is consumption in her family. Would he be justified in breaking off the match, on discovering this, seeing how the girl is likely to have inherited the disease?

❦❦❦

Before doing anything so cruel, "Distracted" should get proper medical advice. If this proves that the girl is herself likely to become consumptive, then there is little doubt that it will be his absolute duty to break off the match. Without health, marriage is always more or less an injustice to future generations, and the grief in store for a father and mother of consumptive children will be far greater than that of breaking of the match while there is yet time.

❦❦❦

But the examination may reveal that this fear is groundless. All the girl may have inherited may be a "predisposition" to the disease. The relative who died from it may have caught it as a result of infection or severe cold, in which case it does not follow that the girl is more subject to it than others. Everyone is predisposed to some complaint or another from heredity, and the art of living should be to avoid developing disease by proper food and habits. If "Distracted's" *fiancee* is merely predisposed to consumption, and not actually consumptive, there should be no need for a breach of the engagement. But if the marriage takes place, he should take care to surround his wife with proper comforts and precautions, which may preserve her from any danger to developing consumption.

❦❦❦

How to Attract.

"Amy" is a girl who admits she is not at all pretty, and very little accomplished. She asks me what, under the circumstances, are the best things to cultivate in order to make herself attractive to those she meets. The best quality, "Amy," for attracting others is personal sympathy. Even if you cannot be talkative and brilliant yourself, you can always make many friends by listening and helping them to make a confidant of you by listening to their hobbies, fads, troubles, or anything else they may like to talk to you about. Sympathy often counts very much more in attracting others than beauty and brilliancy.

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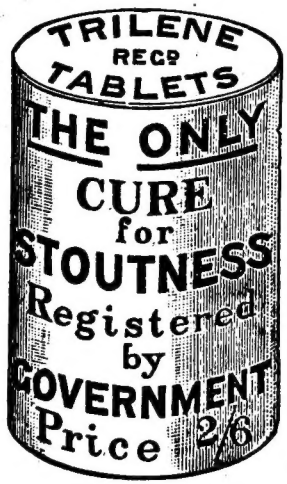

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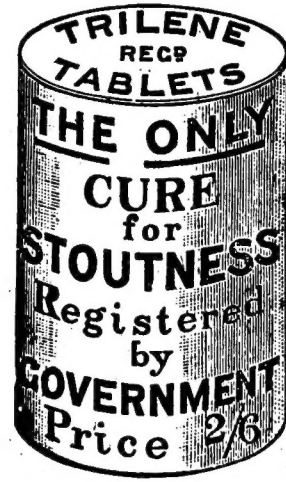

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Risholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 5lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 23nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 4lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1¼ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9¼st., and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a wonderful of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER, of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

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